

Southern New Hampshire University

“If That’s Art Then I’m a Hottentot!”:  
American Art’s Divorce From the American People

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial  
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## **Abstract**

In the second half of the twentieth-century American Art experienced significant changes. Despite the rapid development of modernism in Europe, American Artists continued in a very representative style of painting. After World War II and with the advent of the Cold War came the rise of the Abstract Expressionist artists like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell. These artists painted in a new style that was not at all representative and was not understood by large segments of the American population. This new style of American Art was called Abstract Expressionism and it came to dominate the international art scene and change the direction of American Art.

During the Great Depression many American were out of work and the WPA's Federal Arts Project, paid many artists just to paint. These WPA artists benefitted from the opportunity to be paid by the government to work without regard to marketability, patron expectations or even personal financial needs. Following World War II America was left with significant wealth while Europe was struggling to recover physically and economically. Paris was unable to maintain its reputation as the artistic cultural center, relinquishing that status to New York City which had become a vibrant and supportive artistic community that the Abstract Expressionist could continue benefit from. Additionally, Abstract Expressionism enjoyed the unique benefit of the political situation created by the Cold War years following WWII. Abstract Expressionism was covertly supported by the Central Intelligence Agency to be used as a Cold War weapon to combat communist ideology and demonstrate the freedom of expression possible under democracy.

Yet despite these advantages, many Americans did not exhibit an appreciation for the work of these new artists. There were protests to exhibitions, public sculptures and government funding of the arts. There was also much criticism, both from recognized scholars and the general public. These changes in American Art produced a significant shift in the public's attention away from contemporary art and towards more traditional styles of painting. This shift resulted in a dramatic split in the culture of the American people that remains to this day.

## **Dedication**

To

All the American Artists who struggle each day to “make it” in the arts.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Preface

As a young American Art student, I quickly experienced the odd separation between artists and non-artists. I gained new artist friends while I still maintained old relationships that did not share my growing appreciation in the contemporary visual arts. I found myself in two very distinct sub-cultures that I experienced on a daily basis. It was apparent that the two cultures did not easily communicate. The artists had their own language and focus. Non-artists all seemed to carry around the same question that expressed itself whenever confronted by contemporary American Art. They would look at contemporary art with the question, “How is that art?” I selected the title of this work from a quote from Harry S. Truman who upon viewing one of the first exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism exclaimed, “If that’s art then I’m a Hottentot!”. The president said what many Americans were thinking, and many still think. I quickly discovered that as I studied art and entered further into the culture of American Art, I was entering into a subculture of the American people that was distinctly separate from non-artists.

As I was learning about Abstract Expressionism, Modernism and Post Modernism, it became more difficult to discuss these topics with others. Typically, in these situations people just drift further apart as they start to gravitate towards others with more similar interests. This is often how subcultures form. Some distinguishing characteristic, geographic location or common interest causes individuals to form smaller sub groups. Oddly, the more similar they are, the more one small difference seems to matter.

Prior to World War II American Art permeated much of the general population. After the war however, much changed and American Art became much less figurative, and required more

of the viewer to make that connection between artist and the audience. In many cases, I had to research artists extensively to understand what they were accomplishing with their work and I needed to see their art in context with what other artists were doing at the time.

It's not that other non-artists did not like art. They just could not connect with the same artists or appreciate some aspect of what the artists were trying to say or do. They also did not accept the idea that one should have to research an artist or artwork to truly appreciate it. There exists an expectation that art is supposed to speak in a way that people can understand, or it is just babble. That assumption exists because for thousands of years that is the way it was. When the first caveman drew a buffalo on the wall everyone looked at it and said, "Yeah, Buffalo!" There was an immediate connection. With the advent of Modern art in Europe and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S. many viewers, including, knowledgeable art critics, no longer understood what artists were trying to say.

What complicates the topic is the popularity in America of artists like Thomas Kinkade and Bob Ross. These are names you don't even bring up in art school. You will not find these artists mentioned in any American Art history books, or part of an art museum collection. Still many Americans love their work. Kinkade was able to support a chain of retail outlets that exclusively sold his work, and Ross was on television teaching Americans to paint for many years. Both artists are American and extremely popular and collected by private art collectors to this day. Finding scholarly criticism of these artists and artists like them is difficult. Most of the historians of American Art would not consider serious examination of these artists as historically valuable. Leaving them out of the history of American Art demonstrates an unspoken definition of American Art that ignores an aspect of American culture. The popularity of these artists must

tell us something about American attitudes towards art in a broader cultural sense. What it can tell us is not something art historians, and curators are examining in American Art history.

As I continued to learn about art, my understanding and appreciation for alternative approaches to art grew. I developed a great affection for works by Pollock, Duchamp, and Matisse. What has become very clear, and is the focus of this paper, is that a significant change happened in the second half of the twentieth-century with American Art. That change caused a significant split in the American culture and it has become more and more fractured as time progressed. This fracturing process, however, is not well represented in the current history of American Art. The very aspect of artworks being popular segregates it from the historical dialog. Historians of American Art have examined the progression of art movements, and in so doing have made art history more about art and less about history. Rather than art being a lens to view history, it has become a separate topic divorced from the American people. The divorce was an ugly one and both sides seem to move further away from each other every year. As American Art pursued and eventually became addicted to shock value, it lost the audience it should be communicating with. In response many Americans turned to representations of familiar themes, sentimental imagery of romantic ideas that failed to draw them into a higher dialog of cultural interaction.

It is not my intention to try to mend this fence. The differences are irreconcilable. There is too much invested in the current direction of American Art for collectors to embrace any change, and Americans no longer speak the same visual language needed to engage with what is being created. Furthermore, the aspects of art that separate Americans are intensely subjective and difficult to evaluate objectively. What I am intending, is to examine an aspect of American

cultural history that many historians prefer to avoid. I want to define the events responsible for this dramatic change in American Art and the negative space created when two subcultures were formed and, despite their overwhelming similarities, became unable to communicate and drifted so far apart

## **Introduction**

This paper is an examination of the dramatic change and its causes in the history of American Art that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. It is very important to recognize that this is not an art history paper. This is an American history paper. As such, I will examine developments of American Art in the second half of the twentieth century with a very broad definition of American Art. This paper also strives to remain as objective as possible on a subject that is universally understood to be almost entirely subjective. Historians of American Art exercise a large degree of selectiveness when they include art works and artists in their stories. This selectiveness is necessary to make the history manageable due to the large amount of American Art to examine. How those selections get made will significantly influence the character of the historian's story and its value in understanding American Art.

The definition of American Art that I am working with is art that is created by Americans and has become a recognizable feature of the American culture. I am not restricting this history to works of any particular movement, style, collection, museum, or artists. Rather this is a more objective view of American Art in the second half of the twentieth century. A topic that maintains diverse opinions, and cultural influences. These divisions are often strong and intensely protected. As we will see, these they are also difficult to define and remain nested in very subjective valuations. It is perhaps the subjective nature that makes these opinions so divisive and fueled the changes we will see following World War II.

So dramatic were the changes in the art of America that they created a cultural split between the artistic community and the American public at large. Prior to this time period,

American Art filled a significant role in American culture and experience. American people held a strong connection to the art being created by artists like Grant Wood, Norman Rockwell, Edward Hopper, and earlier work by artists like John Singer Sargent or Thomas Eakins. However, after World War II, American Art changed significantly. That change created a cultural split between the artistic community and the rest of the American public. It was at this time that American Art became a subculture of the American people and no longer connected with the thoughts and ideas of many Americans. American Art became about the art itself and less of a product of the American culture. Since that time the split has only become wider as American Art progressed in a very different direction than popular American culture.

From its very beginnings, American Art was built upon the artistic heritage in Europe. Separated from Europe by large oceans, American Art grew independently as it responded to the very different space and culture that it existed in. Early American Artists often trained in Europe or traveled there to learn from a more established artistic community, but back in North America art developed to fill unique political and sociological expectations while reflecting the new American culture and experience. As a result, changes in art, that began in Europe, typically had a delayed impact on American Art and artists.



**Figure 1: L'Eminence Grise<sup>1</sup>**

In Europe, the art world was dominated by the Paris Académie des Beaux-Arts that maintained strict standards of acceptable artwork. Paintings needed to be of the highest quality with careful execution of composition, tone and accurate representation even upon close examination. Acceptance by the salon would include awards to artists including commissions and general recognition by the artistic community and wealthy patrons. Historical subjects, religious scenes, and portraits were highly regarded by the academy but landscapes and still life

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Léon Gérôme, *L'Eminence Grise*, 1874, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Accessed September 9, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822000752194](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000752194).



paintings received less attention. Recognition by the academy would make or break an artists' career and there was little room for artists who tried to innovate.

The Impressionist, rather than produce highly developed accurate renderings demanded by the academy, preferred to work with an "impression of the subject" that at close viewing might be difficult to discern but from a distance would develop more fully. They also gravitated to landscapes and still life as predominant themes. The Academy rejected many of the impressionist's paintings from their salon show of 1863. Due to an overwhelming reaction by the French public, Emperor Napoleon III viewed the rejected work and created the Salon des Refuse so that the public would all be able to view this new work. This style of painting soon spread to the United States and influenced American Artists like Mary Cassatt, William Merritt Chase, Frederick Carl Frieseke, and Childe Hassam. Both French and American Impressionist paintings are featured prominently in the collections of many museums in the U.S. These works remain extremely popular and exhibitions of these works rank among the most visited.

Once the standards of art were loosened, the changes in artistic approach continued. Soon European artists were exploring and experimented with modern art. Impressionism gave way to Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism as compositions became less and less representational. American Art, however, retained much of its representational style for many years after the Armory show of 1913, which I will discuss further in Chapter 1, brought many examples of the modern art of European artists to America. Styles changed as time passed but American Art lost little of its representational focus. After World War II, however, widespread change in wealth, politics, society, technology, and culture created a new American Art. Earlier exhibition of Social Realism and the American Scene painters gave way to a new movement

called Abstract Expressionism. This new movement incubated in the depression era Work Progress Administration's Federal Arts Program in New York City was a drastic and sudden break with the representative work that preceded it.

The change in American Art was unprecedented. The dramatic shift came so quickly that it caused a split in American culture as few Americans were able to comprehend what this new art was all about. American Art was no longer the traditional subjects like portraits, landscapes, or physical objects. American Art became about the art itself. It was about freedom of expression, action painting, and color. On June 7, 1943, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb co-wrote a letter, to the Art editor of the New York Times, Edward Alden Jewel. The letter was in response to a short negative review of their artwork titled "Modern Painters Open Show Today". In the letter, the two artists state, "No possible set of notes can explain our paintings. Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker. The appreciation of art is a true marriage of minds. And in art, as in marriage, lack of consummation is ground for annulment."<sup>2</sup> In this early letter, Rothko and Gottlieb are recognizing the split or in their words "annulment" between artists and those who cannot understand their work. The letter continues to express the esthetic beliefs held by the artist. One of which is, "It is our functions as artists to make the spectator see the world our way—not his way." Sounding much like the arguments of a divorce settlement, these artists were rewriting the traditional relationship that most Americans were accustomed to. They were redefining the relationship between artist and viewer.

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.

These comments are an early explanation of how Abstract Expressionists were trying to change not only the rules and relationship of art they were changing the objectives of art. Further, Gottlieb explains this new relationship “It is true that modern art has severely limited subject matter in order to exploit the technical aspects of painting.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than create a painting that connects with the viewer on a common experience, these artists were looking for the viewer to connect with them. In doing so they have removed subject matter as a focus and made the technical aspects of painting the subject. This was a concept that developed into the understanding of art for art's sake. As these changes came about much of the work was exhibited in New York City where artists, curators, art critics, and art buyers together focused on the rise of this new form of American Art.

The rest of America removed from the Abstract Expressionists artists and New York City were not able to connect with the new paintings and sculptures that were filling the art reviews and galleries. Most Americans held on to their traditions of art being a representation of some subject they could identify with. Abstract Expressionists were not providing that representation and expected the public to accept them on their terms. The art culture of New York City continued to follow this direction taking art further away from representation. This change in direction was understood and appreciated by the artistic elite who are well read on the artist's intentions, but the direction was not readily apparent from the work itself even by many of the artistically informed. The review by Arts editor of the New York Times, Edward Alden Jewell, that Rothko and Gottlieb respond to is clear evidence of that fact. In the review Jewell writes, “You will have to make of Mark Rothko’s “The Syrian Bull” what you can; nor is this

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.

department prepared to shed the slighted enlightenment when it comes to Adolph Gottlieb's "The Rape of Persephone"<sup>4</sup> This disconnect between the artist and a large number of viewers resulted in the new work being misunderstood and separating with large portions of the American public who just didn't get it.

As art progresses through the various developments from Abstract Expressionism, those who disconnected from modern art found themselves drawn to the art they had known and loved. Artists like Edward Hopper, Norman Rockwell, Grant Wood, and Andrew Wythe continued to paint and establish names for themselves despite their categorization by critics as "low art". Allan Wallach explains this concept of high and low art in an essay included in an anthology titled *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*. Wallach's essay titled "The Norman Rockwell Museum and the Representation of Social Conflict" explains that "High art status" meaning collectible by museum institutions and worthy of being part of the history of American Art. Wallach writes, "This is not an inherent attribute of certain paintings or sculptures, but a claim made for them by critics and institutions. This art ideology deems certain types of art "low" or "popular"-for example, illustrations of the sort Rockwell created."<sup>5</sup> It can

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Alden Jewell, "Modern Painters Open Show Today," *New York Times*, 1943. (1923-Current file), Jun 02. Accessed September 12, 2018. <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/docview/106430509?accountid=3783>.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Wallach, "The Norman Rockwell Museum and the Representation of Social Conflict" Johnson, Patricia. Ed. *Seeing High and Low: Representing Conflict in American Visual Culture*. (Berkley CA.: University of California Press. 2006), 285.

be understood that since Wallach's essay focuses on the creation of the Norman Rockwell Museum, that the definition of institution does not include the Norman Rockwell Museum.

Michael Lewis in his essay in *Commentary Magazine* titled "How Art Became Irrelevant" examines the cultural developments since this split between the art world and American culture. Lewis identifies that the relationship between the American people and contemporary art is one of indifference. Lewis writes, "For while the fine arts can survive a hostile or ignorant public or even a fanatically prudish one, they cannot long survive an indifferent one. And that is the nature of the present Western response to art, visual and otherwise: indifference."<sup>6</sup> Lewis sees a general de-sensitizing of the public that can be explained as a cultural split. He shows how the public used to be more aware of people and events related to the art world, but now artists rarely enter the public arena since the NEA controversies of the 1990's. Lewis concludes that disengagement between the public and art has taken place. He writes, "The fine arts and the performing arts have indeed ceased to matter in Western culture, other than in honorific or pecuniary terms, and they no longer shape in meaningful ways our image of ourselves or define our collective values. This collapse in the prestige and consequence of art is the central cultural phenomenon of our day."<sup>7</sup> Lewis concludes that a true relationship art should not enrich the human experience, but rather human experience should enrich the arts. The connection between human experience and the arts should provide the arts with substance

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Lewis, "How Art Became Irrelevant: A chronological survey of the demise of art," *Commentary Magazine*, July 1, 2015, Accessed August 25, 2018, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/how-art-became-irrelevant/>.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, "How Art Became Irrelevant: A chronological survey of the demise of art."

and meaning. Since he sees the two as disconnected it leaves the arts as he writes, "as a plucked flower".<sup>8</sup>

What I intend to argue is that in the second half of the twentieth-century American Art shifted away from beauty, traditional elements of composition, artistic standards, and the representation of subject matter and toward abstractionism, methodology, the tragic, ugly and shocking with the subject of the art being the art itself. American Artists expected viewers to follow along, but they did not. The shock value of new art became a standard characteristic that drove media attention and eventually monetary value. It is important to understand that the public becomes desensitized to the shocking aspects of art, requiring artists to become more and more controversial as we will see later in this paper.

Generally, the art community discusses shock value with terms like breaking down boundaries, redefining assumptions, or a new interpretation. Not all Americans wanted these boundaries broken down. This resulted in a dramatic split between the American culture and contemporary American Art. American Art became the product of a sub-culture of the American public that was incomprehensible to many of the American people. This artistic sub-culture deemed itself worthy of defining "high and low art" similar to the great Salons of Paris that rejected the Impressionist painters not so long ago. In the process, American Art has become disconnected from the larger culture of the American people who view contemporary American Art as irrelevant.

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis, "How Art Became Irrelevant: A chronological survey of the demise of art."

By itself, contemporary American Art is no longer an effective lens for the study of American cultural history. Rather than become a reflection of the American culture of its time, the history of American Art in the second half of the twentieth century has become an isolated topic disconnected from American history. Artists address the indifference of the American people by continually shocking the public by breaking with cultural expectations, violating social mores, challenging any attempt at definition, or restrictions of appropriateness. These efforts on the part of the artists have only led to widening the gap and brought about the indifference that American Art cannot overcome.

This argument is not intended to be an evaluation of good or bad art. It is not a condemnation or rebuke of any artists or art movement. It also is not an attempt to expose any wrongdoing on the part of any actors in the history of American Art, and it is certainly not advocating any change in artistic process or development. What it is intended to do, is proposed that the use of American Art as a historical lens to inform history on the culture of the American people requires a broader definition of American Art to include much that art historians have ignored. Historians must consider the art styles and movements that broke with the mainstream art history and are typically not represented in most major art museums. Many of these works do not fit within the narrow definition of high American Art of the twentieth century. That definition is contested, fluid, controversial, and sometimes arbitrary. It also does not adequately represent much of the art that informs historians on the diverse and splintered nature of the American people.

To support my argument, I will look at American Art in three categories of American paintings and an examination of why they were chosen. First, I will examine American Art prior

to World War II and its role in the American culture providing a framework for understanding the role of American Art up to that point, considering the traditions and expectation of artists in the American culture. Second, I will look at the New York School and Abstract Expressionist who became the focus of American Art during the Cold War. I will examine their methods, objectives, their role in the political and cultural climate of the Cold War, and the factors that influenced their rapid climb to prominence in American Art. Also, I will consider the further development of American Art history up to the end of the twentieth century and examine the development of this sub-culture of American Art. Thirdly, I will examine the broader American culture, and consider the work of artists that continued in the realist tradition despite the lack of attention by art historians.

Information sources that supplement the thesis will include gathering information on public response to the changes in American Art. Art reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, editorial cartoons, and television news documentaries that represent the popular response to American Art as well as the objectives of the artists themselves. Public responses to government funding of the arts like the National Endowment for the Arts or NEA sparked national debate when large sections of the populations lead by the Moral Majority reacted to grants for artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano whose work was deemed obscene. Opponents to the work of these two artists were successful at retracting their grants and nearly succeeded in defunding the NEA altogether.

There are histories of art movements in America, and most major artists have published biographies, but I found none that bridge the gap between American Art and popular American Artists who create works commonly referred to as low art. Typically, most art histories follow



the path of Abstract Expressionism to modernism, post-modernism, to contemporary American Art without consideration of the many different directions or genre of American Art. Historians have debated how and why American Art changed from Social Realism and the American Scene painters to Abstract Expressionism and Modernism, but much of the history of American Art ignores developments of these more realistic and representational painters, as well as new artists working in similar ways, after World War II.

Recent histories have identified factors influencing the focus on Abstract Expressionism including significant funding from the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA in a covert plan to use Abstract Expressionism as a Cold War weapon. These activities by the CIA are well researched by Francis Stoner Saunders in her book titled, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. In this history, Saunders effectively demonstrates that the CIA funneled large sums of money through many secondary organizations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom to fund exhibitions, periodicals, books, even individual artists. All of whom advanced the progress of modernist American Art and demonstrated the freedom of expression that existed under democracy.

The CIA used these secondary organizations to hide the source of the money because it was believed that many members of these organizations would not have otherwise accepted the money or cooperated in the objective. As a result, most if not all of the employees working for these organizations that created art, wrote articles, curated and managed artist's projects during this time had no idea they were part of an organization funded by the CIA.

Serge Guilbaut in his contribution to the topic titled, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* went so far as to claim a systematic conversion of American Artists to the modernist tradition and using them as “Cold War Warriors.”<sup>9</sup> This conclusion is refuted by Irving Sandler who in his response to both of these histories in an article titled, “Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War “ published in *Art in America* in 2008 attributes these changes to three significant factors including, the artistic response to the trauma of World War II, America’s economic prosperity following the war, and Europe’s inability to maintain the cultural environment while rebuilding.<sup>10</sup> This debate has been well argued on both sides. However, the influence of an artist being included in an exhibition, mentioned in an art journal, or the representation of an artist's work in a published history of American Art cannot be overstated, and the CIA’s role in making each of these happen for Abstract Expressionist artists cannot be discounted.

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<sup>9</sup> Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. 1983), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Irving Sandler, "Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War," *Art in America*, (June/July 2008).



**Figure 2 Triumph of the New York School<sup>11</sup>**

The aspect of America's increased wealth coming out of the second world war certainly sets a significant stage for the rise in prominence of American Art. Not only did the U.S. economy energize the art market but many European artists like Marcel Duchamp emigrated to the U.S. Creating an artistic drain in Europe. The recognition of this situation is well demonstrated in Mark Tansey's 1984 painting titled *Triumph of the New York School* which depicts a tongue-in-cheek scene featuring the Abstract Expressionists accepting the surrender of the European modernist painters all in military uniforms. These economic and geopolitical

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Tansey, *Triumph of the New York School*, 1984

events produced a ripple effect of diversifying American Art as the economy grew and more people emigrated to the U.S. The debate over what American Art is, has remained very much in question. Over time the identifying factors have expanded as the American population has changed, and immigration produced new influences that become part of American culture and resulted in very diverse contributions to American Art.

The second half of the twentieth century has seen significant additions to the field including African American Art, Native American Art, Graffiti art, Chicano art, among many others. Art historians such as Adam Gopnik, argue the basic characteristics of American Art that remain reminiscent of the pre-World War II tradition. These characteristics focus on realist paintings which document the landscape and naturalism, as well as social and political history.<sup>12</sup> It is this second half of the twentieth century when art history changes its discourse and splits from popular culture. American Art in the second half of the twentieth-century followed the modernist tradition and became more about the progression of art. It became art for art's sake and resulted in declaring the death of painting as artists pursued more conceptual, theatrical and performance directions in art. As such it became more and more of a separate subculture of the American population that was generally not intelligible to those outside.

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<sup>12</sup> Howard Kaplan, "Art Critic Adam Gopnik on what Makes American Art American." Accessed June 2, 2018, <https://americanart.si.edu/blog/eye-level/2012/25/671/art-critic-adam-gopnik-what-makes-american-art-american>.

## Chapter 1: The Roots of American Art

American Art developed with a strong European heritage but developed isolated from Europe by the Atlantic Ocean. As such its development followed a unique path as it reflects the American culture from colonialism to independence and the subsequent national development as the nation grows. Initially, colonial arrivals did not have the time and resources to produce art reflective of their culture. It was many years before these Europeans who initially were focused on survival, got around to creating a truly American form of art. As colonies became more established American Artists began the processes of creating handcrafted items and eventually purely artistic works that soon came to identify American Art.<sup>13</sup>

Early paintings included portraits of wealthy colonists, landscapes, and elements of nature that still fascinated the new arrivals to the continent. American Artists such as John Singleton Copley traveled back to Europe to benefit from a large number of traditional master paintings and architecture to educate and inspire their work. The continued influence of European painting, often of historical themes, established expectations of what was and was not quality art. Whether an artist painted large historical scenes, portraits, engravings, or fashioned handcrafted items such as furniture and household goods with decorative as well as utilitarian considerations there were clear standards recognized by both artists and viewer. Everyday life informed the arts as the arts celebrated and expressed our cultural identity.

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Kaplan, "Art Critic Adam Gopnik on what Makes American Art American," *American Art Smithsonian Institute*, Accessed June 2, 2018, <https://americanart.si.edu/blog/eye-level/2012/25/671/art-critic-adam-gopnik-what-makes-american-art-american>.



**Figure 3 A Boy with a Flying Squirrel<sup>14</sup>**

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<sup>14</sup> John Singleton Copley, *A Boy with a Flying Squirrel*, 1765, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Accessed September 9, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AMBOSTONIG\\_10313625913](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AMBOSTONIG_10313625913).

Artists had rigid formalized training, and craftsman had guilds that set standards of quality workmanship. These traditions had been in place for centuries in western culture and existed in ancient history. Excellent examples of artistic traditions such as these can be found in most cultures. In nearly all cases these artistic traditions follow prescribed expectations of style and quality. American Artists continued to develop an artistic tradition that responded to the cultural identity of the American people. Many American Artists were trained in Europe, by European artists, then returned to America to continue their work. As such, they worked within, and were influenced by, the uniquely American culture. They were motivated artistically and supported financially as they created work that satisfied American Art patrons and connected with popular American culture. These artists needed to work within the demands of the existing art market in order to survive financially and continue to produce work. This situation created a cohesive relationship between artists and the general population.

For the first few centuries, America did not enjoy the same reputation for art that Europe did. The Salons in Paris controlled the art world and set high standards of art. Annual exhibitions were held in Paris and only those artists whose work fit within the prescribed standards were included in these salon shows. American Art developed separate from that community, but American Art schools still maintained similarly high standards for artistic accomplishment. For much of these earlier centuries, artists were trained by a master. Only when considered adequately trained did these artists begin working independently in their own studios.

Styles, however, did change as time progressed. As the American culture changed, artists continued to reflect those changes in their work. Portraits of wealthy Americans and important



historical figures were always sought after. Landscapes of the beautiful new world that was being explored reflected American's fascination with nature. As did the many prints and paintings of plants and wildlife that were abundant in the American countryside. These were



**Figure 4: Niagara<sup>15</sup>**

traditions with an extremely long history. The wealth of the Gilded Age created a larger market for classical painting in the European tradition. Additionally, railroad expansion created the ability for American Artists to travel into the western wilderness. There they painted large landscapes of the newly discovered American West. These paintings were exhibited in the

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<sup>15</sup> Albert Bierstadt, Niagara, ca. 1864, Private Collection



museums of Chicago, New York City and Boston. As a result, the travel business greatly expanded. Then as the Progressive Era began to change society and politics in America, so too did it change American Art. American Artists began to focus on social conditions, industrialization, and poverty. These 'Social Realists' were more concerned with the experiences of Americans than in classical or historical painting. The Ashcan School which originated in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was inspired by the Progressive Era changing society and still in a very representative style choose the poor conditions of urban life to fill their canvases. As the Depression Era arrived the Social Realists continued to examine American life but with more rural themes as well.

Through all this development the connection between artists and the general public was seamless. Art exhibitions were popular forms of entertainment along with the theater and opera and symphony. There was a general appreciation for the work of contemporary artists and public and private buildings typically featured the work of these artists as decorative aspects of the architecture. Controversy over the display of public art, when it existed, typically focused around the inclusion of nude figures that challenged the modesty of American society.

While Gilded Age artists were still following the formal artistic traditions, European artists were beginning to challenge the artistic structure that existed in Paris. The Impressionists were setting up their own exhibitions and proposing new ways of painting the subjects that were the mainstays of traditional arts culture. American Artists were not isolated from these developments. It was common for American Artists to travel to Europe to see the works of the great masters as part of their training. While there, they were inspired by these new

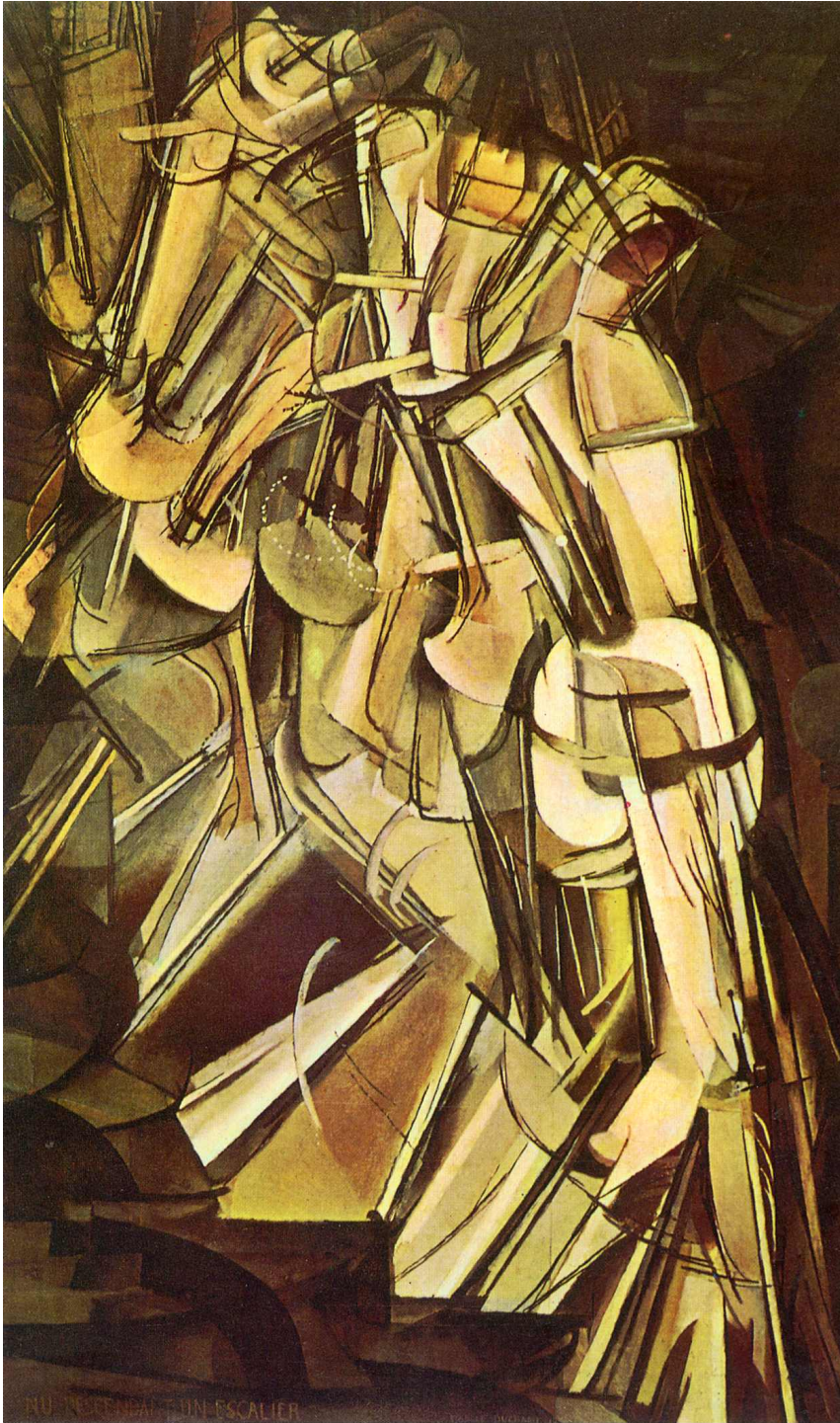
Impressionist paintings. Impressionist painters like Monet, Cezanne, and Renoir broke free of the established artistic tradition that maintained strict standards on what was and was not acceptable art. They changed the course of European art for the next century and beyond.

Artists in Europe were becoming free to experiment and create art that was very different from the traditional salons. Impressionism soon gave birth to post-impressionism which was followed by Fauvism, and Cubism. Each of these movements was becoming more and more detached from representative subject matter with Cubism being the most removed. It was at this time that the International Exhibition of Modern Art more commonly referred to as the Armory show arrived in New York City. This landmark exhibition created by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, included both European and American Artists, but it was the new European art that shocked the American public.<sup>16</sup> 87,000 people toured the show in New York City. 4000 visited on the first night. Marilyn Kushner, the co-curator of an exhibition called "The Armory Show at 100" states in an interview, "Viewers were shocked, [...]" "because they'd never seen anything like this before. And they didn't know how to relate to it."<sup>17</sup> Art historians look to this show as a landmark event that signaled the beginning

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<sup>16</sup> Tom Vitale, "‘Armory Show’ That Shocked America In 1913, Celebrates 100", February 17, 2013, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/17/172002686/armory-show-that-shocked-america-in-1913-celebrates-100>

<sup>17</sup> Tom Vitale, "‘Armory Show’ That Shocked America In 1913, Celebrates 100", February 17, 2013, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/17/172002686/armory-show-that-shocked-america-in-1913-celebrates-100>



**Figure 5 Nude Descending a Staircase.<sup>18</sup>**

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<sup>18</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase*. 1912.  
[http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AIC\\_790008](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AIC_790008). Accessed September 9, 2018.

of the modern art era.

As significant as this show was, American Art in the public eye didn't change all that quickly. American Artists still painted very realistically. Certainly, some painters did experiment with ideas similar to the European artists. In Europe modernism continued to develop as Cubism was followed by Dada which was followed by Surrealism. In America however, the major art movements like the American Scene painters and Social Realism were the major focus. The Armory show received a lot of media attention and many of these works did sell. Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" sold for \$324 over \$5000 with today's inflationary figures, so the work was not entirely unpopular, but still American's maintained their preference for realism.<sup>19</sup>

As Kushner says The Armory show was shocking to the American public. Theodore Roosevelt visited the show and responded in an article published in a March issue of *Outlook* where he responded by saying, "Probably we err in treating most of these pictures seriously. It is likely that many of them represent in the painters the astute appreciation of the powers to make folly lucrative which the late P. T. Barnum showed with his faked mermaid. There are thousands of people who will pay small sums to look at a faked mermaid; and now and then one of this kind with enough money will buy a Cubist picture, or a picture of a misshapen nude woman, repellent from every standpoint."<sup>20</sup> Kim Orcutt adds a historical entry titled,

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Martinez, "A Mixed Reception for Modernism: The 1913 Armory Show at the Art Institute of Chicago," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 31-105, doi:10.2307/4108763.

<sup>20</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "A Layman's Views of an Art Exhibition," *Outlook*, 103 (29 March 1913): 718-720.

“The Exquisite, The Vulgar, From All Walks Of Life They Came” on Armory.NYHistory.org that many of the attendees of the show had similar negative responses including Famed Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, and J. P. Morgan’s eldest son.<sup>21</sup>

There were, however, notable attendees that were very pleased with what they saw at the Armory. Again, Orcutt writes, “Lillie Bliss, one of the future founders of the Museum of Modern Art, attended daily, and it was said that socialite Lady Ribblesdale, formerly Mrs. John Jacob Astor IV, visited every day before breakfast.”<sup>22</sup> These differing responses indicate a split in the American culture that was beginning to form. These new non-representative art styles like Cubism took some time to take root in the United States. After New York, the show traveled to Chicago and Boston MA. The show certainly influenced many in the American Art community but much of that influence remained in the North East.

Through much of the following years, American Artists created work that was very realistic. There certainly was significant innovation and style development, but much of what was exhibited and reviewed in the art community was very representational. It was as if America was watching what was going on in Europe but lacked the public interest to dive into the changes taking place there. It's not that Americans did not accept European artistic influence. Most movements in American Art were influenced by the European artist. Earlier we discussed Impressionism, which had a significant influence on American Artists and gave rise to

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<sup>21</sup> Kim Orcutt, “The Exquisite, The Vulgar, From All Walks of Life They Came” Accessed September 1, 2018, <http://armory.nyhistory.org/the-exquisite-the-vulgar-from-all-walks-of-life-they-came/>.

<sup>22</sup> Kim Orcutt, “The Exquisite, The Vulgar, From All Walks of Life They Came.”

the American impressionists. The Hudson River School was largely influenced by the Romantics. These movements were very representational.

Around the same time that New Yorkers were being shocked by the Armory show, Russian Constructivists on the other side of the globe were developing their new art movement and architectural style. These Russian artists used the properties of materials and the spaces they occupy as inspiration. They engaged the viewer in the construction process of their art as they choose topics of everyday life and industrialization in their work. This popular movement in Russia spread quickly to Europe and inspired modernist artists there and the Bauhaus and De Stijl art movements.

These Russian Constructivists were thinking very much in harmony with the concepts of the impending revolution. The Bolsheviks employed these artists to produce posters and literature to promote the ideology of the revolution, but their art was very much ahead of its time. Far too much for Joseph Stalin. Eventually, the Russian artists who were at the forefront of the modernist movement were outlawed in their own country. The Soviets preferred what we now refer to as Socialist Realism. Stalin liked large paintings of beautiful strong Russians in productive factories, farms, and battlefields. He wanted perfect flowers, and abundant crops and large Soviet flags that celebrated the revolution. Outlawed were the Constructivists and any artist not following the approved artistic styles. There was no room for any other style of art and Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's cultural spokesman, purged all writers, musicians, artists, intellectuals, and scientists who were guilty of "neglect of ideology and



subservience to Western influence”.<sup>23</sup> Communist China followed a very similar path with their art. This country with a rich heritage and distinct artistic culture made their own brand of Socialist Realism to promote the ideas and propaganda of their revolution. These



**Figure 6 V.I. Lenin and I.V. Stalin.** <sup>24</sup>

oppressive policies forced many artists to emigrate to the west where they became influential in the art and architectural movements inspired by the Constructivists.

<sup>23</sup> Amy Dempsey, *Art in the Modern Era: A Guide to Styles, Schools, & Movements 1860 to the Present*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2002) 168.

<sup>24</sup> Nikolai Ivanovich Shestopalov, *V.I. Lenin and I.V. Stalin*. 1938, Gosudarstvennyi muzeino-vystavochnyi tsentr ROSIZO. Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/lenin-and-stalin-1938-found-in-the-collection-of-the-state-news-photo/464438765#/lenin-and-stalin-1938-found-in-the-collection-of-the-state-museum-and-picture-id464438765>.

Instrumental in the promotion and development of American Art prior to World War II was the “Works Progress Administrations Federal Art Project” formed as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal following the stock market crash of 1929. The Great Depression left many American Artists unable to produce art due to a lack of employment and market demand for art. Under the direction of Edgar Holger Cahill, and in the shadow of severe economic crisis, the Federal Art Project or FAP provided the financial support that put artists to work. “Established in August 1935.”<sup>25</sup> FAP artists produced some 2500 murals; over 17,000 sculptures, 108,000 paintings, 200,000 prints from 11,000 designs, 2 million silkscreen posters from 35,000 designs, and more than 22,000 plates for the Index of American Design. About two million children were taught in FAP classes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 69.5.2 Records of the Federal Art Project (FAP). Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/069.html#69.5.2>

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Hills, "Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project," *Oxford Art Online* (2011): *Grove Art Online*, Accessed September 2, 2018, <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T2091131>.





**Figure 7 Artists on WPA.<sup>27</sup>**

Jillian Russo writes in an essay titled, “The Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project Reconsidered” that, “Prior to the economic crisis, [...] a broad market for American Art had not yet been established.”<sup>28</sup> There were many accomplished artists in America, but Paris was still the cultural center of western civilization. Collectors and critics were still going to Paris to see and purchase great artworks. Under the WPA FAP artists, who would otherwise have to work another job to support their art making, were instead supported with federal money and assigned work projects that allowed them to continue to create art. The artists were placed in

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<sup>27</sup> Moses Soyer, *Artists on WPA*, 1935, Accessed September 10, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822001167814](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001167814),

<sup>28</sup> Jillian Russo “The Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project Reconsidered”, *Visual Resources*, 34:1-2, 13-32, (2018) Accessed September 12, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/01973762.2018.1436800

eight divisions: murals, easel paintings, photographs, sculptures, graphics, posters, motion pictures and the Index of American Design.<sup>29</sup>

This government program provided artists with the opportunity to continue to create art without constraints of market demands, economics, and social pressures to conform to any expectations of art. They were not restricted by art critics or the personal preferences of collectors in the artistic community.

The FAP combined the two objectives of providing work relief for American Artists and arts education integrated arts into the community. In the FAP manual Cahill explains the program's dual goals as "Through the employment of creative artists it is hoped to secure for the public outstanding examples of contemporary American Art; through art teaching and recreational art activities to create a broader national art consciousness [...] The aim of the project will be to work toward an integration of the arts with the daily life of the community, and fine arts and practical arts."<sup>30</sup> Of greatest significance is the ability of artists to create whatever they wanted without concern for the patron, marketability or social convention. Either way, they were paid by the government to keep painting.

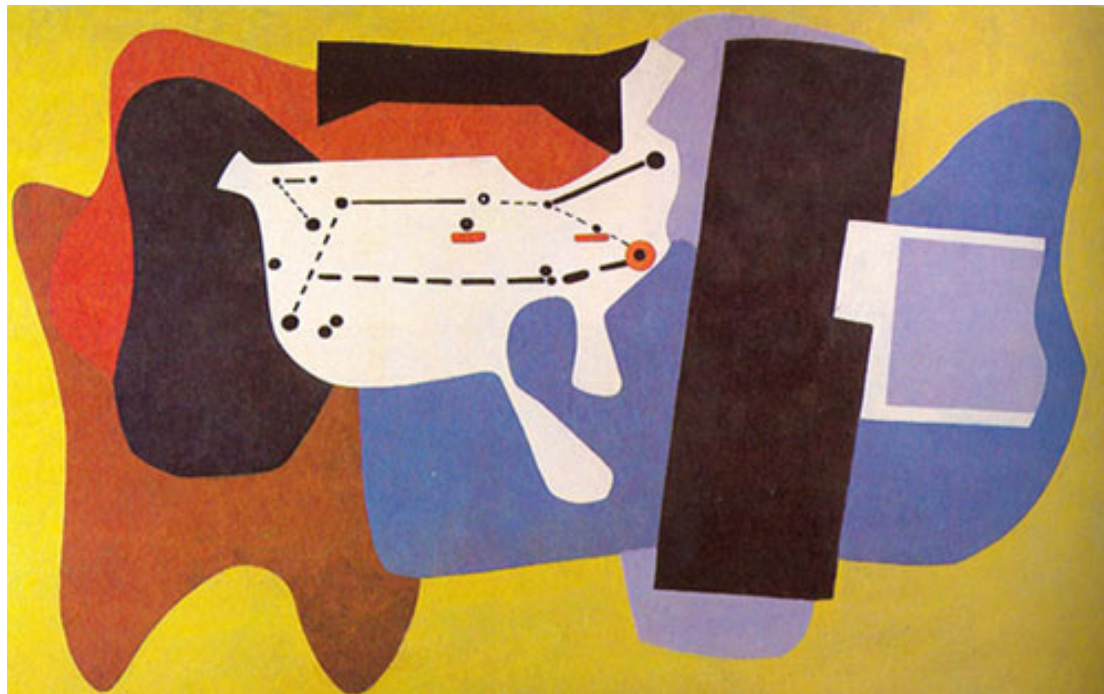
The program was not looking to produce specific works of art that would later become collections in museums but primarily focused on putting artist to work. Among the artists who benefited from the FAP were Stuart Davis (1892–1964), Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), Arshile Gorky (1904–1948), Philip Guston (1913–1980), Marsden Hartley (1887–1943), Lee

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<sup>29</sup> Hills, Patricia, "Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project." *Oxford Art Online: Grove Art Online*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 2, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> McKinzie, Richard D. *The New Deal for Artists*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. 1975, 79.

Krasner (1908–1984), Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000), Norman Lewis (1909–1979), Jackson



**Figure 8 Aviation: Evolution of Forms under Aerodynamic Limitations<sup>31</sup>**

Pollock (1912–1956), Mark Rothko (1903–1970), and Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967). Later many of these artists developed artwork and methods of creating art that historians' group together as Abstract Expressionist. It was during this period of WPA support that these artists were able to experiment and try new methods of art making.

During much of the four years that the FAP was providing support to artists, they were also creating opportunities for artists to create murals for public spaces. These murals did have to negotiate sometimes difficult public opinion, but in their own studios, these artists could do whatever they wanted. The Cahill and FAP avoided exercising any editorial control over the

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<sup>31</sup> Arshile Gorky, *Aviation: Evolution of Forms under Aerodynamic Limitations*. Ca. 1935 <http://www.hiddenj.com/2011/11/newark-airports-secret-murals-revealed.html>, Accessed September 9, 2018.

artists but with public murals, public comment was unavoidable. In an interview, Lee Krasner states," for example, that it was difficult to get an abstract mural commission because very few places would sponsor them"<sup>32</sup>

Though the artists had the freedom to create new works the general public were typically not supportive of the new ways of painting. Even the art critics of the day often were unsupportive of these artist's work. Ruth Bowman in her work, *Murals without Walls: Arshile Gorky's Aviation Murals Rediscovered* writes about a mural by Arshile Gorky for a public airport, "Despite his adherence to the prescribed aviation theme, Gorky's radical abstractions sparked debate among art critics and the public, who found them unintelligible."<sup>33</sup> This new way of painting was just not connecting with the public or even art critics of the era.

The FAP's focus on communities was most successful in New York City. The FAP in New York City employed 2323 artists. It created in total 200 murals, 2100 sculptures, more than 12,000 easel paintings, and 75,000 prints.<sup>34</sup> Russo writes, "The majority of the Abstract Expressionists took part in the program and the United States would emerge from the Great Depression as an artistic powerhouse in a large part because these artists were able to continue their work during the Great Depression."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Rose, "Interview with Lee Krasner," July 31, 1966, digital collection, Archives in American Art.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Bowman, *Murals without Walls: Arshile Gorky's Aviation Murals Rediscovered*, (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 1978), 39.

<sup>34</sup> Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Jillian Russo, *The Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project Reconsidered*, *Visual Resources*, 34:1-2, 13-32, 2008. Accessed September 12, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/01973762.2018.1436800

Prior to World War II the cultural center of the art world seemed permanently fixed in Paris. Paris with its Salons and artistic heritage was where everyone went to create, view and purchase great art. Paris had the ability to control the art market and to determine what was exhibited and which artists were promoted. Much of this changed after the war. Europe was physically and financially devastated and was faced with a huge burden of rebuilding their countries. Many of their most significant artists emigrated to the United States to escape the conflict.

The United States, on the other hand, exited the war in prosperity. With the exception of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. was removed from the widespread damage of the war. Rather than having to rebuild, Americans found themselves with enhanced infrastructure, enlarged and engaged workforce, and a wealthy economy that was ready to prosper. As a consequence, Americans soon found themselves with the resources to affect the world's art markets. Wealthy Americans were creating important collections and building museums to put them in. More Americans were in a position to create art too. Abstract Expressionists in New York City benefitted from the WPA support to develop this unique style, however, the work of Abstract Expressionist had not yet achieved wide acceptance.

The WPA FAP was a short-lived but created a very formative time for the art of the second half of the century. The freedom to develop their artistic style during this time without the concern of marketability and with the benefit of government support allowed artists to work in ways that otherwise would not have been possible. What Theodore Roosevelt saw as a charade similar to a PT Barnum's exhibit was for these artists serious work. They were taking art in a very new direction and many of them created works that fill

the collections of American Art at most established museums. Today many of these artists enjoy a strong following but at the time most Americans were not willing to go along this artistic direction with them.

Despite the changes over the previous centuries Americans still connected with representational art. Through most of American history, art reflected human experience. It was about people, the world around us, and the historical events that we found important. It was representational and held subject matter that the viewer could identify. Styles changed with American culture's developments but what many Americans could not relate to were paintings that often required a significant amount of research to understand.

## Chapter 2: American Art Divorces the American People

World War II ended with the surrender of the Japanese in 1945. It was at this time that the Abstract Expressionist artist, influenced by the artistic development in Europe and fostered in the WPA Federal Arts Project, was creating new paintings with what they called "action painting" and a form of chromatic abstraction called "color field painting". This style of painting broke the bonds of traditional formal painting where the paintings became more of an abstraction of emotion, subconscious thought, or individual perception. They were impacted by the horrors of World War II including the Nazi concentration camps and the nuclear attacks on Japan.

David Hopkins in his work titled, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* references the German Marxist Theodor Adorno assertion that it would be barbaric to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz. Hopkins writes, "how, he implied, could art measure up to the immensities of technological warfare and the extermination of whole populations."<sup>36</sup> These ideas were very much in the minds of the post-World War II American painters as they processed the events of the war and sought to express their angst in painting. No longer was art a recognizable portrait, landscape or still life, and no longer was art intended to be beautiful. This art was the free expression of the artists subconscious. Hopkins identifies art critics connections between Pollock's "psychic outpourings and the forces unleashed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki."<sup>37</sup> This

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<sup>36</sup> David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000*, (Oxford NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>37</sup> David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000*, 11

new method of making art was a dramatic shift from the work of the American Social Realists and Scene Painters who created work that Americans could understand and connect with.

Rather than the careful execution of line and composition, action painting was impulsive and spontaneous, but not random as some might have assumed. It did, however, break from the expectation of representation and even beauty. These artists were not trying to create a beautiful painting. They were trying to express subconscious feelings in a deliberative and automatic process. The result was art that was very different from earlier American Artists like Andrew Wythe, Grant Wood, and Thomas Hart Benton who were social realists and were very popular at the time.

In Abstract Expressionism the human figure was nearly unrecognizable even beyond Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. There was nothing readily identifiable as landscapes. Sometimes, as in color field painting, there were just large areas of color. Rather than inform the viewer about social issues like poverty, the environment, or injustice, Abstract Expressionists were creating something personal. They were painting their feelings and the art became about the way art expresses those feelings. To some degree, it was experimentation with color line and mark making. There is a recognizable progression in these artist's work as they develop their style. It is not random or meaningless as some of the editorial cartoons, included later in Chapter 3, seem to imply.

It is clear that even among the art collectors in New York City it took some time for this new art movement to catch on. It was not until the 1950's that collectors were starting to



purchase these works.<sup>38</sup> It was much longer before prices caught up to the prices paid for European modernist paintings. Deirdre Robson in an article titled, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag Between Critical and Commercial Acceptance" writes that "Until the mid-1950's the market for modern art continued to be dominated by European artists and some more established, older American painters."<sup>39</sup> It can be assumed that since most collectors at least consider the value, and more important, the future value in their purchases, this lag time should indicate that collectors were unsure whether these new paintings were a good investment.

So dramatic was the contrast between the socioeconomics in New York City and Paris that there was a recognized shift of the cultural center, from Paris to New York City. No longer did art critics focus on what was up and coming to Paris. New York City was where the artists worked and exhibited. Hopkins identifies Peggy Guggenheim as the most significant connection between the artists. Hopkins writes, "This wealthy heiress was beginning to shift the emphasis away from Surrealism at her newly established "Art of this Century" gallery and she gave several Abstract Expressionist early exhibitions."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Deirdre Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," *Archives of American Art Journal* 30, no. 1/4 (1990): Accessed September 1, 2018, [https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/1557387?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/1557387?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), 113.

<sup>39</sup> Robson, "The Market for Abstract Expressionism: The Time Lag between Critical and Commercial Acceptance," 116.

<sup>40</sup> David Hopkins, *Oxford History of Art After Modern Art: 1945-2000*. (Oxford NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8

The timing of this new movement, however, was significant. With the end of World War II, the U.S. had a new enemy and a new war to fight. The Cold War had begun, and the U.S. was eager to contain the spread of communism in Europe. Intellectuals in Europe were still sympathetic to the ideas of Marxism and the U.S. was eager to promote the benefits of democracy. The arts were identified as a vulnerability in the Soviet ideology because of their restriction that all artists must conform to the style of Socialist Realism. With the Soviets oppressing the arts the U.S. was eager to demonstrate the artistic freedom possible in a democracy. The wealth of the United States art market after the war combined with the influx of European artists like Andre Breton, Andre Mason, and Mondrian escaping the war to America, and the strength of the American Artists fostered in the WPA FAP created a stronger American Arts community that supported Abstract Expressionism of its own volition.<sup>41</sup>

In an effort to capitalize on the work of these new artists, the U.S. State Department created an exhibition to showcase their work to the world. Francis S. Saunders in her history titled, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* reveals the expansive efforts to promote this new American Art. Saunders writes, "In 1947 the State Department organized and paid for a touring international exhibition entitled "Advancing American Art", with the aim of rebutting Soviet suggestions that America was a cultural desert. But the show caused outrage at home, prompting Truman to make his Hottentot remark and one bitter congressman to declare: "I am just a dumb American who pays taxes for this kind of trash."

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew Baigell, *A History of American Painting*, (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1971) 240.

Due to public reaction the tour was canceled.<sup>42</sup> This first show was met with harsh criticism from the American public and congressmen who were angered by the use of public money to fund an exhibition of this type and also that many of the artists were communists or at least communist leaning. The show did not complete its tour, but the effort was not abandoned altogether.

It was then that the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA stepped in and began "Operation Long Leash". This operation was intended to continue the promotion of art and literature that demonstrated the unique freedom of expression possible under democracy. Because of the controversy over the artists and the use of public money, "Operation Long Leash" became a covert project creating many intermediary organizations like the "Congress for Cultural Freedom" headed by Michael Josselson, the Fulbright Program, which was established in 1946, and Encounter magazine. As Saunders shows, the CIA conducted a well-organized international program of publications, exhibitions, competitions, and conferences to lead Western Europe away from Marxist and Communist ideology. So extensive was the creation of these seemingly independent organizations that it is unlikely that many of the supported artists or employees of organizations knew the source of funding that made their efforts possible.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to note that much of the work of Abstract Expressionist was centered in New York City. This geographic location was most likely due to the concentration of New York

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<sup>42</sup>“Advancing American Art: exhibition records, 1946-1977”  
*Archives in American Art, Smithsonian Institution*, Accessed September 15, 2018,  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/advancing-american-art-exhibition-records-7109>.

<sup>43</sup> Francis S. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, (New York: The New Press, 1999)

state's WPA FAP funding in the city. Most of the artists supported by the WPA lived in New York City. This is not unusual since artists of most movements and time periods tend to gather geographically. From the Renaissance artists in Florence to the Salons in Paris and now the galleries in New York City, artists gather to share ideas and see what new developments are happening in the arts. They share influences, learn from each other, network with galleries, collectors or patrons and they also argue and compete for opportunities and money. New York City was no different. Artists wanted to be where the art was being created, exhibited and sold, and New York City was where that was happening in the second half of the twentieth century.

As much as this aided the objectives of these artists it also served to isolate them from much of the American people and widen the gap in American culture that was forming. The United States is a large and diverse nation and population, but during this time the art community was focused on New York City and what was happening there. Artists of earlier representational movements and traditions continued to work and sell art. New artists were developing as well and were located in other parts of the country, but they were not getting the same media attention. The work of these artists did not have the impact as a Cold War weapon that Abstract Expressionism had and as a result they were overlooked.

Historians argue over how significant the CIA's role was in the rise of Abstract Expressionism. Many have claimed that the significance of the work was still there and without the CIA and "Operation Long Leash" American Art would have eventually taken the same path. However, it is hard to discount the value of a wealthy patron willing to invest large amounts of money in their success. Government money for artists has a long tradition in the U.S. and how

that money has influenced and directed the path of the history of American Art is a contentious subject.

Abstract Expressionist and others like them were unwilling to return to the representative art of the prewar days. They were tired of the academic methods of art that elevated painting quality over the subject matter.<sup>44</sup> These artists wanted to communicate their artistic angst and respond to the tragic world they found themselves in. They wanted to create something new and different than what American Art had been before. Their work became more about the process of art-making, not the representation of subject matter. It's not that subject matter wasn't important. Indeed, subject matter had become more important, but the subject became the art piece itself.

Artist Adolph Gottlieb writes, "It is true that modern art has severely limited subject matter in order to exploit the technical aspects of painting."<sup>45</sup> The purpose of art changed from responding to American culture to expressing the artists personal feeling as expressed in the technical aspects of paint. American painting became about painting. American Art was about art. It became about defining art and as soon as art was defined the artist would set out breaking that definition once again. All of this existed while much of America stood back and wondered what it was all about. The artists themselves were unwilling to find a connection with the rest of American culture. Again, Gottlieb states, "No possible set of notes can explain our paintings. Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture

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<sup>44</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.

<sup>45</sup> "The Portrait and The Modern Artist," H. Stix Dir., *Art in New York*. October 13, 1943, on WNYC

and onlooker. The appreciation of art is a true marriage of minds. And in art, as in marriage, lack of consummation is ground for annulment.”<sup>46</sup> When Gottlieb speaks of the picture and onlooker it can be assumed he is speaking of the artists and the public. This is the cultural expression of the artist saying, “I want a divorce.”

If these artists had returned to the traditional academy style of painting they feared looking just like everyone else. An examination of the various artists listed on the website of the American Impressionist Society Inc.<sup>47</sup> will reveal a good number of very well executed academy style paintings of portraits, landscapes, and flowers. To the Abstract Expressionist, this work did not communicate to the viewer what the artist experienced or felt. Any new contribution would just be more of something they already had. These artists wanted to shake things up and get the viewer to look at them the artist.<sup>48</sup> This new direction changed the relationship between the artists and the viewer. Rather than the artists responding to the American experience as in the past, now the artist was looking for the viewer to respond to the art. This change in the relationship was understood by many of the artists but it took time for many of the well-known art critics of the day to accept the change and much of the American population still has not accepted this new relationship.

This, of course, was not new to Europe. Dada artists such as the Marcel Duchamp originally from France and later from New York City had been creating very shocking works

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<sup>46</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.

<sup>47</sup> “Home”, *American Impressionist Society Inc.*, Accessed September 15, 2018, <https://americanimpressionistsociety.org/Sys/PublicProfile/34082338/4148479>.

<sup>48</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor.

for some time. Duchamp had exhibited work he called “ready-mades” which were items that



**Figure 9 Prelude to a Broken Arm<sup>49</sup>**

already existed, and he would simply sign them or write something on them. One work titled *Prelude to a Broken Arm* which was a common ordinary snow shovel displayed in a gallery.

Another was a porcelain urinal placed on its back on a pedestal signed R Mutt and titled

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<sup>49</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. 1912,  
[http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/LARRY\\_QUALLS\\_10311401109](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/LARRY_QUALLS_10311401109)

“Fountain”. These works were very shocking to the American public who could not understand why these items were considered art. These found objects did not represent the traditional view of art that implied a certain level of technical skill on the part of the artist. Duchamp’s stated objective was to create “non-retinal art”.

He was more concerned about what you thought than what you saw. These stories are the stuff of legend now in the art world. The location of the original snow shovel is not known but a replacement is on display at the Yale University Art Gallery. What makes this snow shovel valuable enough that Yale would produce a replica, is the story behind it. If Duchamp had painted a realistic painting of a snow shovel and exhibited that, no one would have taken any notice of it, but the shock of an artist submitting a common item you can buy at any hardware store and displaying it as a work of art was hard for most Americans to accept. Even harder to accept was the art world’s acceptance of this piece as a work of art.

Other legendary works include a sculpture by Jasper Johns titled “Painted Bronze (Beer Cans)”. This work was not typical of Johns’ other paintings. This was two beer cans cast in bronze with hand painted labels. One can was opened and the other was not. Johns’ reason for creating this work was a comment by Barnett Newman about the famous and very successful gallery owner Leo Castelli. As the story goes Newman tells Johns’ that if he took two beer cans and placed them on a pedestal that Castelli could sell them. Johns’ obviously





**Figure 10 Painted Bronze (Beer Cans).<sup>50</sup>**

took the challenge and Castelli was successful in selling the work. The question remains, is this story a tribute to Johns' work or Castelli's? Did John's create something of value in and of itself or does the ability of Castelli to sell such a piece become part of the work? Later art critics pointed to various aspects of the two cans as a metaphor for Johns' and Robert

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<sup>50</sup> Johns, Jasper, *Painted Bronze (Beer Cans)*. 1960. Location Unknown.

Rauschenberg and their unique personalities. Whether this metaphor was intended by the artist and a part of the meaning behind the work is not known.<sup>51</sup>

During World War II, many European artists emigrated to the United States. This influx of a number of accomplished artists and the growing economy and population enlarge the artistic community. It was becoming harder for American Artists to stand out in galleries and exhibitions. Media attention became very a valuable stimulus to an artist's career. Stories like Jasper Johns' beer cans and Pollock's drip paintings garnered a lot of media attention. This was the kind of attention that attracted art collectors. Art collectors are looking for work that will bring value and prestige to their collection. Having the snow shovel Duchamp first put on a pedestal would have been very significant to a collector. Artwork that succeeds in gaining media attention or distinguishes itself from what had been done, or looks at subjects in new ways, becomes collectible. It doesn't matter how the work gets attention. Just getting attention makes it part of the history and therefore collectible. If Johns and Newman were making their story up or scamming the purchaser in league with Castelli, it likely would not matter because it was still art and the "Painted Bronze (Beer Cans)" as legendary as Jasper Johns and Leo Castelli.

Once the notable artwork is purchased by a collector the collector then has an invested interest in artwork. Collectors need the art and artist to remain collectible and maintain value. The work is exhibited and written about in art journals and eventually added to art histories

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<sup>51</sup> Rachel Gershman, "Jasper Johns Artist Overview and Analysis". [Internet]. 2018. *TheArtStory.org* Accessed 01 Sep 2018, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-johns-jasper-artworks.htm>.

that become part of teaching curriculums. At some point, they may become part of museum collections. This is where the lessons of Marcel Duchamp and "Prelude to a Broken Arm" need to be considered. The snow shovel was significant because it was on display in an art exhibition. There exists an aspect of art being art because art historians include it in art history and it is exhibited in museums. "Painted Bronze (Beer Cans)" is a work that is well executed. These are not ready-mades. They were cast and then hand painted by the artist. There was thought, and skill applied, and they are representational, but is the art in the craft of the item or the story surrounding the work? If we were to remove the aspect of the story behind the piece would the sculpture be an important contribution to American Art?

The development of American Art has brought along with it many artists and important artworks that art historians need to be very selective about the work they choose to include in their histories. Quality work might not be included in histories because it does not fit the story they are telling, and the historian must exercise editorial license to manage their sources. Art histories must be curated just like an exhibition or any collection of artworks. Many histories focus on a specific collection or a traveling exhibition and the history functions as an exhibition catalog. Other art histories are published by a museum and the history focuses on the museum's collection.

There also exists many non-art-related aspects to art histories. Government funding of the arts through the National Endowment for the Arts or NEA grants and the Moral Majority, a conservative political organization started by televangelist Jerry Farwell, came into conflict when grants were given to artists for work that was deemed obscene. This aspect brought American Art into conflict with the rest of American culture who did find the work in

question obscene. However, the political controversy inspired a significant amount of media attention and many people who had never heard the name Mapplethorpe suddenly knew what he was doing and that their tax dollars were paying for it. This controversy which we will examine more closely later served to provide the media attention, the significant story behind the work, and important historical discussions about what is art, what is obscene, and what are Americans willing to pay for.

The role of the museum is similar to private collectors but are a large organization with an established reputation maintaining their collection as a public service. Museums have specific mission statements that guide maintenance and development of their collections. The mission statement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art has its purpose as “encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of arts to manufacture and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction.” On January 13, 2015, the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art supplemented this mission statement with the following, “The Metropolitan Museum of Art collects, studies, conserves and presents significant works of art across all times and cultures in order to connect people to creativity, knowledge, and ideas.”<sup>52</sup>

The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston Massachusetts or MFA Boston mission statement says, “The Museum’s ultimate aim is to encourage inquiry and to heighten public

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<sup>52</sup> “About the Met,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met>.

understanding and appreciation of the visual world.”<sup>53</sup> The Smithsonian American Art Museum or SAAM Mission statement is, “The Smithsonian American Art Museum is dedicated to collecting, understanding, and enjoying American Art. The Museum celebrates the extraordinary creativity of artists whose works reflect the American experience and global connections.<sup>54</sup> SAAM is unique in that it is funded as part of the Federal Government. None of these mission statements talk about defining American Art or making value decisions on what is and is not acceptable work, but each is dedicated to inspiring investigation and learning in the arts.

These Museums with collections of American Art, collect works that had a significant impact on the progress of American Art and have an invested interest in their collection. Museums publish significant art histories and typically feature their own collections in these histories. These collections become a part of the history of American Art and at the same time promoting the art in Museum collections. This story of American Art is taught to successive generations of American students who can then identify specific works in a museum's collection.

Once the work of the Abstract Expressionist artists became established in significant museum collections American Artists needed to find something new to get the media attention that would make their artwork better known in the art collecting community. This becomes a continual problem for artists since this process started with changing the objectives of art as

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<sup>53</sup> “About,” Museum of Fine Arts Boston, September 12, 2018, <https://www.mfa.org/about/mission-statement>.

<sup>54</sup> “About,” Smithsonian American Art Museum, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://americanart.si.edu/about>.

explained in Rothko and Gottlieb's letter. This problem highlights the role of media attention in the development of American Art. Before World War II artwork was assessed on cultural expectations of beauty and quality. After World War II and with the rise of Abstract Expressionism media attention and shock value become more significant influencing factors.

Once again, we come back to the lessons of Marcel Duchamp who was interviewed at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armory Show by CBS reporter Charles Collingwood where Duchamp states, "There's a public to receive it today [Cubism] that did not exist then. Cubism was sort of forced upon the public to reject it. You know what I mean?" Duchamp said. "Instead, today, any new movement is almost accepted before it started. See, there's no more element of shock anymore."<sup>55</sup> What Duchamp's statement tells us is that some of what Cubism intended was supposed to be shocking. The shock value was part of the art. What perhaps was not anticipated at the time was that shock value wears off as culture changes and becomes desensitized to violations of social mores.

This dynamic setup the inevitability of artists creating works that need to be more and more disturbing to the American public. This is demonstrated by the works of artists Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. Serrano photographed a crucifix submerged in urine titled "Piss Christ" and Mapplethorpe's self-portrait featured a bullwhip thrust into his rectum. These works and many others were intended to shock the viewer and the shock resulted in a political backlash that had their NEA grants rescinded. Political efforts backed by the Moral

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<sup>55</sup>Armory Show That Shocked America in 1913," National Public Radio, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/17/172002686/armory-show-that-shocked-america-in-1913-celebrates-100>.

Majority sought to defund the NEA but those efforts were ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>56</sup> The artists suffered the loss of their grant money but gained significant media attention that focused on the artist's less controversial works as they argued for freedom of expression in the arts.

Public opposition to contemporary art is quite common even in New York City. An article in the September 21, 1981 issue of the New York Times reports on the public response to Richard Serra's sculpture "Tilted Arc".<sup>57</sup> The work had recently been installed and a petition circulated in opposition to the work that referred to the sculpture as a "Graffiti Catcher". The sculpture is a large metal wall in a curved arch that Serra explains, "'Tilted Arc' as 'dislocating the decorative function of the plaza' and 'actively bringing people into a sculptural context.'" The explanation apparently was unsuccessful and defusing the opposition to the work as 1000 workers in the building responded by signing the petition and another 300 on a separate petition from employees of the Environmental Protection Agency protesting the on similar grounds plus opposition to the use of public money for the artwork.

The protestors choose not to oppose the work on aesthetic grounds. The article includes this quote from the petitioners where they admit, "We don't like it esthetically," but Herman Phillips, an information specialist with the environmental agency, who helped frame the petition,

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<sup>56</sup> "How Art Became Irrelevant," Commentary Magazine, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/how-art-became-irrelevant/>

<sup>57</sup> "Serra Work Stirs Downtown Protest," New York Times, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/09/25/arts/serra-work-stirs-downtown-protest.html>.



**Figure 11 Tilted Arc<sup>58</sup>**

said, "but we didn't complain on that basis because art appreciation is such a subjective thing."<sup>59</sup>

The protestors did not understand the objectives of the work and could not find any context to appreciate the work. They could find lots of reasons to oppose it, however, and this is not an isolated instance.

The same article mentions two other significant public art projects for the Art-in-Architecture of the General Services Administration that resulted in significant opposition to the works. The director of the project, Donald Thalacker is quoted saying, "We have received expert opinion from museums in New York and the city's Department of Cultural Affairs endorsing the

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, ca.1980, Accessed September 9, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822000380210](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000380210),

<sup>59</sup> "Serra Work Stirs Downtown Protest," New York Times, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/09/25/arts/serra-work-stirs-downtown-protest.html>.



work and the Art-in-Architecture program's objectives”<sup>60</sup> Serra's artwork and the work of the other artists that faced public opposition are endorsed by the artistic community but do not make an aesthetic connection with the general population. Thalacker was also quoted as saying, "We hope that those who object to it will give the work an opportunity over a period of time before making their final evaluation." Thalacker was apparently very much aware of the temporary effects of art that originally was considered shocking but over time becomes part of the landscape.



**Figure 12 New Shelton Wet/Dry Doubledecker<sup>61</sup>**

<sup>60</sup> “Yes, But is it Art,” CBSNews, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/yes-but-is-it-art/>

<sup>61</sup> Jeff Koons, New Shelton Wet/Dry Doubledecker. 1981 The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Werner and Elaine Dannheisser, Accessed September 9, 2018. [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AMOMA\\_10312310425](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/AMOMA_10312310425).

In one of the more blatant examples of the general public not connecting with contemporary American Art, Morley Safer examines the art market in a 1992 episode of the popular news show *60 Minutes* titled “Yes...but is it art?”<sup>62</sup> In this short segment, just twelve minutes, Safer examines the work of contemporary artists like Jeff Koons. According to Safer, Koons was originally a commodities broker turned artist who creates artworks with common items like vacuum cleaners, or basketballs submerged in aquariums. His sculpture "Balloon Dog" sold for a record-setting 58 million dollars in 2013.<sup>63</sup> Safer is clearly incredulous as he listens to Koons explanation of the work. When asked why his shop vacuum sculpture is worth \$250,000 dollars Koons explains that it comes signed by Koons or with a letter of authenticity.

Safer explains that the value of artworks like Koons’ is based on the opinions of the artists, dealers, and buyers. When examining the way art critics discuss artworks Safer says the explanations “sound important but might as well be in Sanskrit.”<sup>64</sup> For a different perspective, Safer speaks with art critic Hilton Kramer who explains, "Just the act of spending that money on an object makes them feel that they are collaborating in creating the art history of their time."<sup>65</sup> A Los Angeles Times obituary writes of Kramer, “A staunch champion of modernism and fearless

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<sup>62</sup>Yes, But is it Art," CBS News, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/yes-but-is-it-art/>

<sup>63</sup> Katya Kazakina and Philip Boroff, "Koons's Puppy Sets \$58 Million Record for Living Artist", Bloomberg, Accessed November 13, 2013, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-11-13/koons-s-puppy-sets-58-million-record-for-living-artist>

<sup>64</sup> “Yes, But is it Art”, CBS News, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/yes-but-is-it-art/>

<sup>65</sup> "Yes, But is it Art", CBS News.

detractor of most of the art that followed, Kramer was the chief art critic for the New York Times for nearly a decade before giving up the coveted post to start *New Criterion* in 1982. He wrote for that magazine and, during the 1990s, also produced a column for the New York Post, where he regularly bashed his former employer, The Times, as a bastion of liberal dogma.”<sup>66</sup> Kramer was not an American Art outsider. He wrote critically about American Art and worked with a different definition of American Art than many of the artists, art critics, and buyers.

Jean Michel Beskiate is another artist in Safer’s examination. This artist was believed to be a poor black kid discovered on the street by Andy Warhol when Beskiate was creating graffiti art. Safer explains that the story is not true and that Beskiate actually came from an upper-middle-class family, but the story remained a legend in the art world. Fictitious stories are not new in the art world. It is long been understood that other artists like Joseph Beuys invented their biographical stories and artists statement to help market their work. Beuys was a pilot in the German Luftwaffe during World War II. His story of being shot down and rescued by nomadic Turks and covered with grease and wrapped in wool blankets helps explain his art-making process but the story has been discounted. That doesn't prevent the art market from using it to sell art. Recent books for artists on marketing encourage artists to develop a good story behind their work citing Beuys as a valid example.<sup>67</sup> As for Beskiate his work is still collectible, but many viewers featured in Safer's broadcast are unimpressed, In the documentary,

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<sup>66</sup> Elaine Woo, Hilton Kramer dies at 84; polarizing but widely read art critic”, Los Angeles Times, March 28, 2012, 12:00 am, <http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-hilton-kramer-20120328-story.html#>

<sup>67</sup> Brainard Carey, "Making it in the Art World: New Approaches to Galleries, Shows, and Raising Money", (New York NY: Allworth Press, 2011) 107

Safer brings an unidentified small group of what seems to be high school students to the exhibition. Each of the students indicates their inability to understand the work of Beskiate. Many non-artists viewing this artists work say they could do just as well if not better indicating the expectation of most viewers that art requires an element of above average skill.

After the show broadcasted the art community responded calling Safer a philistine lacking esthetic sensibility to understand contemporary art. Carol Vogel of the New York Times reports that Marc Glimcher of the Pace Gallery stated that the segment "stank of anti-intellectualism." The report goes on to say, "The owner of another well-known Manhattan gallery, Andre Emmerich, said the broadcast's "smug, smiling, philistine approach was appalling." And the painter Ellsworth Kelly said that he was "disappointed that a group of people like '60 Minutes' who are generally respected has slipped up so completely that none of them are more sophisticated about the arts."<sup>68</sup> The important aspect of this story is the disconnect between the art world in 1992 and the rest of popular culture as represented by the producers of a highly rated television news outlet like *60 Minutes* aired on CBS since 1968 and even the New York Times calls it, "one of the most esteemed news magazines on American television."<sup>69</sup>

Years later Safer returns to the art world with a new report titled, "Even in Tough Times Contemporary Art Sells." In this episode Safer demonstrates how Contemporary art has become a global economy. More specifically this market is not representative of the rest of the economic

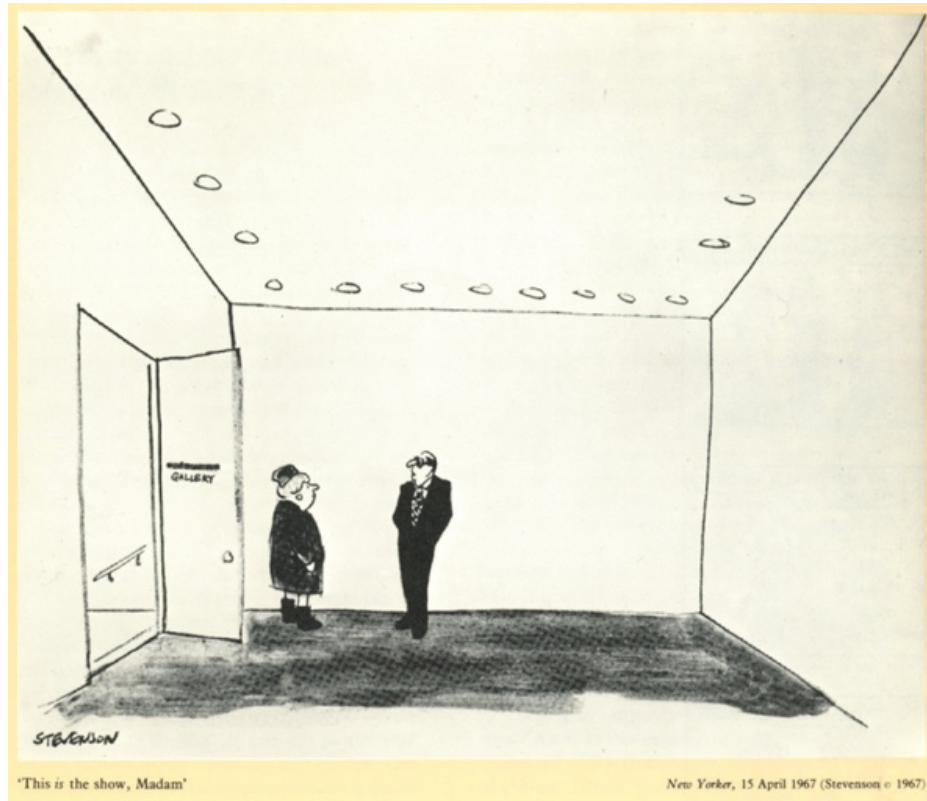
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<sup>68</sup> Carol Vogel, "Art World Is Not Amused by Critique," New York Times 1993, Accessed August 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/04/arts/art-world-is-not-amused-by-critique.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Bill Carter; Michael S. Schmidt "CBS Correspondent Apologizes for Report on Benghazi Attack". The New York Times. November 8, 2013.

market. While stocks are going down contemporary art is rising exponentially. The reason for this major disconnection is that most art buyers are not in the 1%. They are as Tim Blum of Blum and Poe Galleries states in Safer's report, the .00000001%. These are the superrich with money to spend on art no matter what is happening in the rest of the economy. They are also not all American. The influx of Russian and Chinese buyers has served to greatly inflate prices. This is a market that not only do most Americans not connect with, they have no ability to participate.

In this report, Safer visits Miami's art show titled Art Basel. Talking again with Tim Blum he asks, "Do you sometimes have to grit your teeth when making a sale?" Blum reply's, "We're very good at that. We're from Hollywood. We're in the acting game. It's theater. This is all theater" All of the selling is surrounded with what Safer calls art speak. Safer says, "Art speak can seem as opaque as spilled alphabet soup" It becomes clear that Safer, an artist himself, really does not understand all the critiques. Jeffery Dutch, director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, was also in the original story. He reminds Safer that the art world has not forgotten his original story in the 90's. He states, "When the first episode aired, in terms of market value Jeff Koons was selling at \$250,000 and now Koons work sells at 25 million dollars." Dutch here is using sales totals to define American Art, but Safer is clear that the art world is an unregulated commodities market where price fixing and control of supply to maintain demand is both legal and commonplace. Whether the works Safer examined are, or are not, art is a subjective assessment. Many of the buyers seem very pleased with their purchases and are likely to continue. The reality is, they are a very small segment of the population.



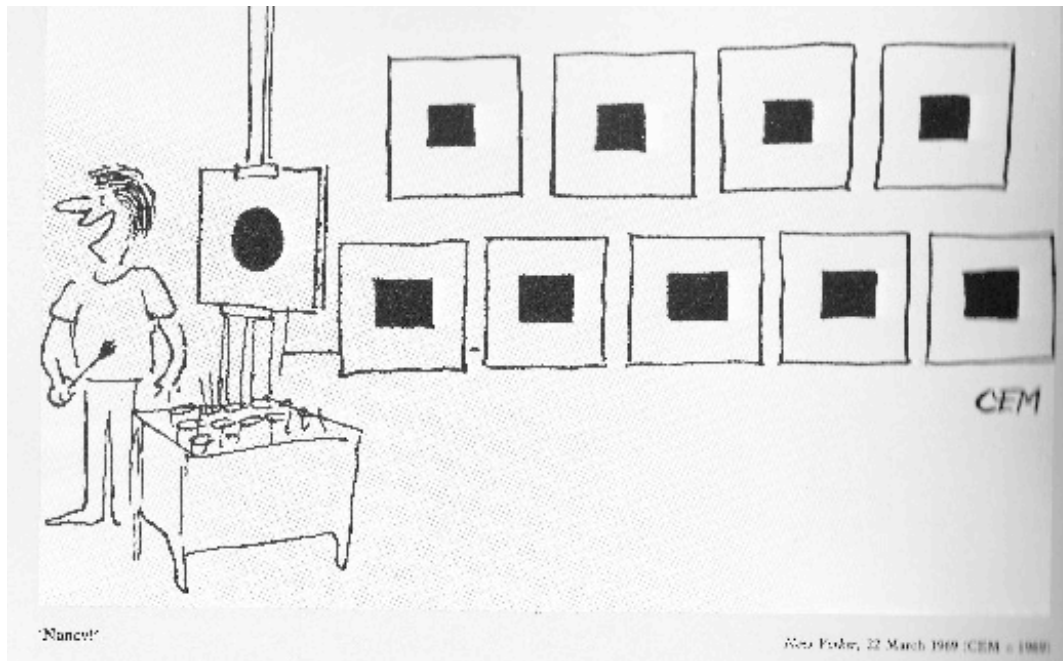
**Figure 13 This is the Show Madam<sup>70</sup>**

Editorial cartoons about modern art are common and date back to the 1800's in response to the Impressionist painters and before the Armory Show in New York City. The existence of these cartoons demonstrates the public's inability to appreciate developments in art away from representation. The cartoons are not isolated to any one artists or movement and they are not the product of one publication in particular. These responses to modern art consist of a broad commentary on art from the perspective of the other side of this cultural divide. The message is clear that most Americans don't understand new developments in art. It also indicates that the results of the path that art was on were anticipated by these cartoons long before they arrived.

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<sup>70</sup> Stevenson, *This is the Show Madam*, New Yorker 15 April 1967

In this cartoon from New Yorker Magazine dated April 15, 1967, the caption reads "This is the show, Madam" As early as 1967 these cartoons are projecting that art will be reduced to an empty room, perhaps because that is what the public was seeing in American Art at the time- nothing. The Tate Museum in London published a collection of these cartoons lampooning modern art for a show in 1987. The book was titled, *A Child of Six Could Do It!: Cartoons About Modern Art* and features 114 cartoons from as early as 1877.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 14 Nancy!**<sup>72</sup>

Some editorial cartoons are the product of Abstract Expressionist artist Ad Reinhardt. Reinhardt is famous for his black on black painting of 1957 which he proclaimed would be the

<sup>71</sup> "A Child of Six Could Do It!: Cartoons About Modern Art, THE TATE GALLERY", London: Tate Gallery, 1987

<sup>72</sup> CEM, "Nancy" *New Yorker*, March 22, 1969.

end of painting.<sup>73</sup> Reinhardt's cartoons can be found in numerous periodicals. Françoise Mouly, in an article titled, "Ad Reinhardt's Cartoons" featured in *New Yorker Magazine* Dec 6 2013 list some of his publications in, "*Glamour, Macy's, the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, the New Masses, the Saturday Evening Post, and Ice Cream World*, the publication of the ice-cream trade, for which he was the art director."<sup>74</sup> The popularity of these editorial cartoons illustrates the general public's inability to connect with much of the art created in the second half of the twentieth century. Reinhardt's dual role as a minimalist artist, as well as the cartoonist, bridges the gap between the artists and the viewer. In doing so Reinhardt highlights the existence of that gap and recognizes that many just do not understand his artwork.

The relationship between the artist and the viewer was correctly identified by Rothko and Gottlieb as mentioned earlier in their famous letter to Mr. Edward Alden Jewell Art Editor, *New York Times* where they said the lack of consummation is ground for annulment.<sup>75</sup> What these two artists are announcing is a condition that is understood and mutually agreed upon between artist and viewer. The typical American does not understand much of the American Art created after World War II. The drip paintings of Pollock are frequently compared to drop cloths. Many are unimpressed with contemporary art and claim they could create better art themselves. At the same time, American Artists are striving to express themselves and new and different methods of art-making in an effort to impact American culture.

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<sup>73</sup> Françoise Mouly, "Ad Reinhardt's Cartoons", *New Yorker Magazine* Dec 6, 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/ad-reinhardts-cartoons>. Accessed August 25, 2018

<sup>74</sup> Françoise Mouly, "Ad Reinhardt's Cartoons"

<sup>75</sup> Marcus Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb, A Letter the Art Editor, *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.



These artistic developments redefine American Art and challenge expectations of subject matter and skilled execution. Rather than continuing to reflect the American experience, American Artists have endeavored to present themselves and their ideas and feelings toward the viewer in a relationship that is no longer embraced by their viewers. The artists have ignored the needs of the viewer and rejected any attempt to respect the viewers. Instead, American Artists have continually shocked art viewers and violated social mores in an effort to remain significant. This has resulted in a market that creates artificial value by the acceptance of false artists statements and perceived value.

### **Chapter 3: The Forgotten American Art: Marginalized American Artists**

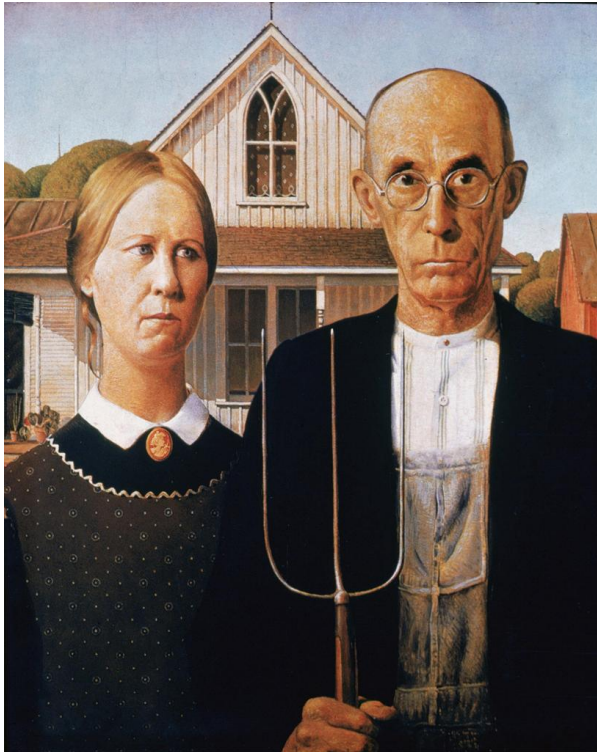
With the divorce papers served and American Art following its own path, the American people found themselves following a very different esthetic. The American public continued to follow the artists they enjoyed. They connected with art that was more conventional, related to their own experiences and most of all provided a representative and traditional style of execution. As focus on the Avant-Garde stole media attention from established art movements, a very large audience was gathering around artists who continued to maintain the former artist viewer relationship.

Many of these artists did not exhibit their work in the same channels as the Abstract Expressionist and the subsequent art movements. Artists who remained popular with the American public continued to work in the margins of the art world. Marginally due mostly to their inability capture the attention of the mainstream media. No longer collected by major art museums or included in significant collections of American Art, these artists could be found in popular media like magazines and retail shops accessible to the general population.

Many art historians viewed these artists as producing “low” art and not a significant consideration in the development of American Art history. The very aspect of these artists having popular appeal was the delineation between high and low art. Americans, however, loved the work of these artists. Many amassed significant collections of their work and often artists creating what was deemed “high art” owned examples of this popular works in their own collections. The lack of media attention did not stop these artists from continuing to

painting and connecting with the American people. They just did so in another arena altogether.

Grant Wood was one Social Realist painter who focused on subjects that made immediate connections with the American public. His most famous work “American Gothic” has



**Figure 15 American Gothic<sup>76</sup>**

become an iconic work that is continually recreated by artists looking to comment on the changing American culture. The painting is a portrait of two Iowan towns people. One an older man and the other his daughter. The man is holding a pitch fork and they stand in front

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<sup>76</sup> Grant Wood, American Gothic, 1930, Accessed September 9, 2018  
[http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/CARNEGIE\\_5140006](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/CARNEGIE_5140006), Art Institute of Chicago,

of a typical Iowan farmhouse. The work was a representation of typical middle America that so many Americans were familiar with and they could make an immediate connection with the painting.

Originally the work was submitted to the Art Institute of Chicago's Forty-Third Annual Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture. Steven Biel in his history of the painting titled, *American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting*, relates to us a claim by one of the trustees that he pulled *American Gothic* from the rejection pile. He then took the painting to the chairman of the exhibition jury who refers to the painting as a "comic valentine". The jury was urged to award the painting a prize. The jury was persuaded, and the painting was awarded the Norman Wait Harris Bronze Medal with a cash prize of \$300 on October 30, 1930.<sup>77</sup>

What was originally overlooked by the AIC jury became one of the most famous and iconic paintings of American Art. So iconic is this painting that when popular media wants to make commentary about American culture the painting becomes the vehicle of choice. A quick internet image search of the painting will produce a large number of recreations of the work in an updated cultural context. Recreations have substituted many Presidents and First Lady's, popular television personalities, and other recognizable Americans for the original Iowan towns people. The commonality of these frequent parodies is that they are all trying to make statements about Americans and American popular culture.

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<sup>77</sup> Steven Biel, *American Gothic: A Life of America's Most Famous Painting*, (New York NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 28.

Often these re-creations would catch the attention of Grant Wood's sister who posed as the daughter in the painting. Fiercely defensive of her brother's work the 77-year old Nan Wood Graham has sued many notable media outlets for their use of the work. They include Playboy and Hustler magazines for a sexually explicit renditions and the late Johnny Carson for his bikini-clad version of the work, broadcast on network television.

Satirically dubbed, “the Rembrandt of Pumpkin Creek” by John Canaday of the New York Times<sup>78</sup>, Norman Rockwell was an artist that had an immediate connection with the American public. His work, however, is not generally grouped with a particular movement in American Art and is not included in many museum collections. The National Gallery acquired one of his book illustrations as part of a donated art collection but it is not a well-known example of the artist's work. In Deborah Solomon’s biography of the artist, *American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell*, she indicates that although many art critics discounted his work “Rockwell commanded respect among painters and sculptors across the artistic spectrum. Willem De Kooning openly expressed his adulation for him. Andy Warhol bought two of his paintings.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Canaday, Rockwell Retrospective in Brooklyn,” New York Times March 23, 1972, p. 48

<sup>79</sup> Deborah Solomon, *American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell*: New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 2013. 11.



**Figure 16 Rosie the Riveter<sup>80</sup>**

Rockwell was a regular contributor of illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post* producing 323 covers<sup>81</sup>. His works regularly provided art featuring figurative studies that illustrated typical American culture and experiences. During World War II, his painting of Rosie the Riveter featured on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* highlighted the changing

<sup>80</sup> Norman Rockwell, *Rosie the Riveter*, 1942, Accessed September 12, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822001160447](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001160447)

<sup>81</sup> About the Museum, Norman Rockwell Museum, Accessed September 12, 2108, <https://www.nrm.org/about/the-museum/>

roles of America's women in the work force and celebrated their strength and value to the war effort. Rockwell mirrored the figure from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling painting of the prophet Isaiah<sup>82</sup> retaining the halo and resting her feet on a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The message of course resonated quickly with Americans and especially American women who were seeing their roles in American culture changing dramatically.



**Figure 17 The Rookie<sup>83</sup>**

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<sup>82</sup> Rockwell, Norman. *Rosie the Riveter Post Cover*. *Saturday Evening Post* May 29, 1943. Accessed September 11, 2018, [http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822001160454..](http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001160454..)

<sup>83</sup> Rockwell, Norman. *The Rookie*, 1957, Private Collection, Accessed September 12, 2018, <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2013/10/01/art-entertainment/the-rookie.html>.

Generally considered an illustrator rather than an artist, even by Rockwell himself, his work rarely makes it into museum collections other than the one created specifically dedicated to his work in Stockbridge MA. In 1993 the Norman Rockwell Museum moved to its present location in the Steven Spielberg/Time Warner Communications Building so named after the two major contributors to the building. Spielberg, the American filmmaker, is an avid collector of Rockwell's work.<sup>84</sup> The absence of Rockwell's work from other museums is conspicuous, since his artwork does not fit into the definition of American Art held by establish museums of American Art.

That does not mean that the work is not collectible or valuable. A recent auction of Rockwell's painting "The Rookie" sold for 22.5 million dollars.<sup>85</sup> The painting is really much more than an illustration. The work combines important American themes including baseball which is a national pastime, famous icons of the sport like Ted Williams, and that awkward experience we all feel when it's our first day on the job. Additionally, the work used classical composition of figures, contrast, depth, and well-executed figure-ground relationships. This is the type of painting that Americans find easy to connect with. There are no barriers of shock or violated social mores for Americans to deal with. It is, however, the type of work that critics and art institutions classify as "low art" and not suitable for museum collections.<sup>86</sup> Despite the fact

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<sup>84</sup> Allan Wallach, "The Norman Rockwell Museum and the Representation of Social Conflict, *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*, (Los Angelis CA: University of California Press, 2006), 281.

<sup>85</sup> "Rockwell's Baseball Painting The Rookie Sells-for-20-Million," National Public Radio, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/05/22/314866985/rockwells-baseball-painting-the-rookie-sells-for-20-million>

<sup>86</sup> Allan Wallach, "The Norman Rockwell Museum and the Representation of Social Conflict, *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*, (Los Angelis CA: University of California Press, 2006), P 281



that American Art had moved on from Abstract Expressionism to Post Modernism, Rockwell continued to paint until his death in 1978. Frank Sinatra, John Wayne, and David Bowie are among his final portrait commissions.<sup>87</sup>

More recently there has been a return to the traditional studio practice of fine art through the development of independent academy studios run by professional artists who practice classical realist painting and sculpture. Many of these studios function as classrooms for newer artists seeking training in this traditional approach. The Art Renewal Center is one organization that supports these studios with competitions called salons, recognition of standards, and providing a large database of artwork by current and earlier artists. The website of the ARC states that they are, “the foremost and only vetting service for skill-based visual art schools since 2002.”<sup>88</sup>

Fred Ross, Founder and Chairman of the Art Renewal Center, writes in an essay titled “The Philosophy of ARC,” “The visual fine arts of drawing, painting and sculpture are best understood as a language ... a visual language. Very much like spoken and written languages, it was developed and preserved as a means of communication. And very much like language it is successful if communication takes place and unsuccessful if it does not.”<sup>89</sup> This position of the ARC has much in common with the ideas stated by Rothko and Gottlieb back in 1943. It is agreed that the objective is communication but where the two differ is that when the

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<sup>87</sup> Deborah Solomon, *American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell*: New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013, 434.

<sup>88</sup> “Search”, *Art Renewal Center*, Accessed September 15, 2018, The Art Renewal Center is the foremost and only vetting service for skill-based visual art schools since 2002.

<sup>89</sup> Fred Ross, “The Philosophy of ARC,” *Art Renewal Center*, Accessed September 15, 2018, <https://www.artrenewal.org/Article/Title/the-philosophy-of-arc>.

communication fails the Abstract Expressionist view the failure on the part of the viewer and the ARC on the part of the artist. At least 50 such studios in the United States currently exist to create artwork in the traditional style and to train new artists to follow in this philosophy of art.

If Norman Rockwell's illustrations are considered "low art" then by the same critics Thomas Kinkade doesn't even register. You will not find his work in any art history books, any museums, or exhibited at any New York Galleries. He did, however, produce enough work and following, to support retail stores in shopping malls exclusively for his work. The wide success of the retail stores indicates there existed a large customer base to purchase his work. Media Arts Inc. the corporations that marketed and distributed Kinkade's work maintained a relationship with Hallmark that was producing a seven-figure income for the artist.<sup>90</sup> As the only American Artist publicly traded on the stock exchange, Kinkade employed multiple artists in his studio. This is not a new concept. Most great master artists like Rembrandt and Leonardo Da Vinci ran studios with assisting artists who would work on their paintings with the master, but Media arts employed additional artists to broaden their artistic styles and increase marketability.

Not only did Kinkade's work sell as original paintings in his galleries, but as limited-edition prints, calendars, cards, and additional merchandising items like mugs, shirts, mouse pads etc.<sup>91</sup> Americans didn't seem to care that his work is considered "low art" or less, they purchased his work in whatever form they could afford.

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<sup>90</sup> Kuskey, Eric G., *Billion Dollar Painter: The Triumph and Tragedy of Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light*, New York: Weinstein Publishing, 2014, 54

<sup>91</sup> Kuskey, Eric G., *Billion Dollar Painter: The Triumph and Tragedy of Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light*, 77.

What differentiated Kinkade from other American Artists, that you will find in the numerous volumes of American Art history, is that he painted almost exclusively for mass appeal. There is no social commentary like Grant Wood, no representation of American life like Norman Rockwell. There is no action painting, like Pollock or De Kooning, and no gimmick or story behind the art like Jasper Johns beer cans or Jeff Koons vacuum cleaner. It is pure representation of imagined romanticized landscapes with dramatic lighting that most in the art world, contemporary or not, would classify as trash.

In an article published in *American Art* titled “Thomas Kinkade's Romantic Landscape” Michael Clapper takes a much different view. He examines Kinkade’s work and its connection to artists such as Thomas Cole, Norman Rockwell, and Caspar David Friedrich all of who’s influence can be seen in Kinkade’s work. Yet Clapper acknowledges the significant lack of critical examination of Kinkade’s work.<sup>92</sup> It would appear that much of the art community simply ignores this artist and when many refer to American Art even low American Art they are not even including Kinkade in the discussion.

Clapper sees the reason that popular response to Kinkade’s work and the critical disregard is that viewers maintain different values and hold different standards of sentimentalism, artistic quality, and the nature and purpose of art. He also acknowledges a conflict in Kinkade’s sincere pursuit of offering viewers a relief from the cultural malaise that has resulted in a multi-million-dollar capitalist venture. Clapper writes, “Those who admire his

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<sup>92</sup> Kuskey, Eric G., *Billion Dollar Painter: The Triumph and Tragedy of Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light*, 78.

art usually do not begrudge him his monetary profits; skeptics question his sincerity, without which sentiment is just a ploy.”<sup>93</sup>

Like Kinkade, Bob Ross will also not be found in any art history books. You will not find his work included in any museum collections. He practiced the “wet on wet” method of painting which allowed him to finish a complete painting in 30 minutes. His paintings were sentimental landscapes, and like Kinkade’s paintings, provided the viewer with an unrealistic romantic version of reality filled with “Happy Trees” as Ross called them. Ross was the star of the long-running television art instruction show called *The Joy of Painting*. Much of the popularity of the show can be attributed to the aspect of all his paintings being happy scenes, and the 30-minute painting time fit perfectly in the television show format. The show is now still popular on Youtube.com even after the artists death. His many fans were inspired toward efforts to call for his inclusion in American Art history as reported in Kelly Crow’s article in the Wall Street Journal. Crow writes, “Over the past few years, younger artists who aren’t as concerned with distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow have started making pieces inspired by Mr. Ross”<sup>94</sup>

The absence of Kinkade’s and Ross’ work from histories of American Art can be attributed the assessment of their work by most critics and historians as “low art.” Their work does not attempt to make any social comment or even to reflect any aspect of American culture.

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<sup>93</sup> Kuskey, Eric G., *Billion Dollar Painter: The Triumph and Tragedy of Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> Kelly Crow, "A Renaissance for Bob Ross: Fans Want the ‘Joy of Painting’ Host to Have a Spot in Art History." *Wall Street Journal - Online Edition*, August 22, 2018., 1, *Business Source Ultimate*, accessed September 15, 2018, EBSCOhost.

Their work does not stretch the definition of art or break any new ground in the creation of art.

They are sentimental happy, and reliable. They do, however, appeal to a significant portion of the American population that likes the sentimental, happy and reliable aspect of their work.

They are looking for more of that in their lives and the idea that art, as Gottlieb says, should focus on the tragic is not in their concept of art.

### **Conclusion: Using American Art as a Historical Lens**

From its early beginnings, American Art enjoyed a close relationship to the culture of the American people. The rules of art were well-known, and expectations of skill and formal composition and subject matter were broadly understood by viewers of American Art. The relationship between artists and viewer was one where the needs of the American public for artistic interpretation of life and culture was met by the desire of the artist to respond to the experiences they shared as Americans. Early landscapes and drawings of natural features documented the new world that Americans were ready to explore and discover. Portraits recorded the likeness of American presidents and significant Americans and historical paintings reminded Americans of the significant accomplishments of the new nation.

Although these alone should not be considered an accurate and complete historical record they do inform history on how Americans viewed the subjects and wanted to remember them. The large body of American Art created before World War II strives to fulfill this relationship between artist and viewer in a manner that each side of the relationship benefits from the act of creating art. American Artists, trained in American Art schools, relied upon the private art market to purchase their work. In order to sell works, these artists needed to respond to the needs and desires of the American public who would purchase their work or commission it for public installations.

As we saw, the twentieth century brought significant changes to that relationship. Not just in American Art but in much of the world. The horrors of World War I brought political changes, as well as major economic shifting as Europe consumed massive war debt and the

United States, unable to avoid involvement, was ultimately drawn in. Changes happened very quickly during the early decades of the twentieth century and the economic increase following the war was quickly followed by the Great Depression leaving many Americans unemployed.

In response to the widespread unemployment, government aid was used to get American back to work. The WPA FAP was created to provide American Artists with the financial support necessary to continue to produce art. This program created a unique opportunity for artists to not only continue their work, but also removed from them any outside influence on the creation of art. There were no patrons to satisfy, no government control over style or subject matter and except in the case of public installations no public opinion to deal with. This was a situation that never previously existed.

The WPA FAP in New York State concentrated most of its funding in New York City where many of the artists that directly benefitted from the government support were free to experiment with action painting, color, and abstractionism. They were free to create what they wanted and, as was expressed by the Rothko and Gottlieb letter to the art editor of the *New York Times*, the artists used this opportunity to change the relationship between artist and viewer. The artists were creating for themselves and expecting the viewer to understand.

Following post-impressionism, European art changed rapidly, and Americans were exposed to this work at the Armory show of 1913 and then between the two world wars as many Americans traveled in Europe. The changes in Europe, however, had not changed American Art significantly. Exhibitions of the WPA artists work, although it had its wealthy admirers, was not well received by many major art critics even in New York City.

These artists who were greatly affected by World War II's dramatic economic changes, and influenced by rapid changes in the art of Europe rewrote the relationship between artists and viewer and dramatically changed the face of American Art. This was not a slow incremental change. Grant Wood painted *American Gothic* in 1930. The WPA FAP was established in 1935 with many of these artists already responding to the changes in Europe. During the years of the WPA, Abstract expressionist artists were developing their styles, but the program ended with little response to the artist's work and much of the work created during this time was sold off at drastically reduced prices.

The artists of the WPA supported during the depression were called upon later in the Cold War to demonstrate the freedom of expression possible under democracy. The Abstract Expressionists were a stark contrast to the Socialist Realism that was the only acceptable art style under communist governments. Now, these artists benefitted from renewed government funding, significant media attention, and an American economy that provided a wealthy elite that had money to spend on art. Incubated in the WPA artists now had every advantage to become major contributors to American Art. Americans who connected with paintings of Grant Wood, Edward Hopper, and Norman Rockwell were now being confronted with the action painting of Willem De Kooning, the color fields of Mark Rothko and the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock that got him nicknamed by *Time Magazine* as "Jack the Dripper."<sup>1</sup>

Historians argue over the impact of the CIA's Long leash program in promoting Abstract Expressionism, but government support at a minimum replaced the needed

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<sup>1</sup> "The Wild Ones". *Time* (magazine). February 20, 1956. Accessed September 15, 2008, [http://support.ebsco.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/help/?int=ehost&lang=&feature\\_id=ChiAD](http://support.ebsco.com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/help/?int=ehost&lang=&feature_id=ChiAD)



recognition of their work lost when Rothko and Gottlieb announced their divorce with the American public. Continued media attention and support by the New York City art community fostered the development of Abstract Expressionism which further developed into Neo-Dada, Pop Art, and Minimalism. Each of these developments seeking something new and redefining American Art and remaining in the focus of American Art history.

Eventually, artists needed to become more and more shocking to grasp the attention of the American public that had turned and walked away. Artists continued to cross the lines of social mores and moral decency. Eventually igniting a backlash from conservative elements in the American public. Despite the inability of the Moral Majority to end the NEA funding of the arts, most Americans had turned away from a relationship between artists and viewer that they saw as irrelevant. The battle between the art world and elements of the Moral Majority are oddly similar to the common legal battles between a husband and wife over money, property, and custody of the children after a divorce. The situation, however, did lead the artists into a fast-growing art market where wealthy public and private art collectors were willing to spend large sums of money on artwork for speculative as well as artistic reasons.

The value of a work of art is mainly driven by auction results. What a buyer will pay at the auction is influenced by a number of factors in addition to simply personal preference. Other factors include previous sales of the work and other works by the same artist, media attention, perceived significance in the art market, and anticipated appreciation in value. The significance of the work in the history of American Art is only one of the many factors that affect value. As we have seen the value of contemporary artworks, as well as media attention, has done much to influence the significance of an individual work of art in American Art

history, and art buyers see themselves as contributors to the history of the art of their time. These contributions, however, come from a very small percentage of the American people.

Meanwhile, Americans who see this work as irrelevant have returned to artists who continue in the relationship that existed before World War II. For good or bad, the artists examined do make a connection with large portions of the American people. If income generation were the gauge of significance, as Jeffery Dutch, director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art implied earlier, Jeff Koons would still not surpass Thomas Kinkade's success. Norman Rockwell's work is demanding similar sale prices. Rockwell's work, though rarely seen in national museum collections, is appreciated and collected by artists like Andy Warhol, and media giants like Steven Spielberg.

What I have intended to show is that in the progress of American Art history, American Art has broken its long-established relationship with the American people. What art critics call "high" art has become the definition of American Art and "low" art, popular with many Americans, has generally been omitted from American Art history. Although art critics struggle to define American Art, they can easily say what it is not. What the rest of American popular culture values, finds a connection with and can understand is not considered American Art. As such, American Art has lost its connection to the larger American people. That is not to say that American Art does not mirror the American culture but more accurately it reflects a small part of the American culture.

Popular culture has turned a blind eye to the art world and returned to the art that identifies with their experience. Museum attendance is expanding and outpacing even the combined revenue of the sports industry and amusement parks. The building of museums and

the renovation of older ones is seen as a source of economic development for cities with the increase in tourist revenue.<sup>2</sup> “The Bilbao effect,” the notion that the building of a prestige museum can transform the international profile of a city and make it a pilgrimage destination, was a recognition of the success of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. This project recovered the cost of its construction which in just three years, partially through admissions but mostly through increased tourist revenue.

Much of this success in museum attendance can be attributed to the changes in museum exhibitions. The Metropolitan’s exhibition of the “Treasures of Tutankhamen” is recognized as a sea change in the museum industry. Attendance at museums is an indication that Americans like art but the exhibitions that they are flocking to in the twentieth century are not contemporary American Art. “Treasures of Tutankhamen” drew 1.3 million visitors in 1979. The Mona Lisa in 1963 brought just over 1 million when the U.S. population was just 180 million<sup>3</sup> Contemporary art doesn’t draw big numbers until "Jeff Koons on the Roof" in 2008 draws 657 thousand when the U.S. population was over 300 million.<sup>4</sup> Many of the top museum exhibitions designed to draw more attendees are Impressionists like Monet and Renoir, or ancient artifacts like the MFA Boston’s Pompeii A.D. 79.

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<sup>2</sup> “Bilbao Effect,” The Guardian, Accessed September 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/oct/01/bilbao-effect-frank-gehry-guggenheim-global-craze>

<sup>3</sup> “U.S. Population in Millions: 1940 to 2050”, U.S. Census [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/1940census/CSPAN\\_1940slides.pdf](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/1940census/CSPAN_1940slides.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Alex Greenberger, “A Look at the Met’s Top 10 Most Visited Exhibitions of All Time” *ArtNews*, 09/12/15 9:00 AM. Accessed August 25, 2018, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/09/12/a-look-at-the-mets-top-ten-most-visited-exhibitions-of-all-time/>,

As with any divorce, to fully understand the whole situation one needs to fully examine both sides of the conflict. The chasm between the two cultures is so large that it remains difficult for either side to value the other. American Art history has become about art and not about the American people. Like a neglected spouse, the American people have run to the romance of Impressionist painters, and the sentimentality of artists like Thomas Kinkade and Bob Ross. Meanwhile, the American artists and art historians continue to cater to the “.00000001%” of America’s wealthy art buyers who willingly pay higher and higher prices for artwork that connects with a very limited sector of the American public.

### Appendix: List of Artwork

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